

Unit 68: Supporting Effective Communication with People with Learning Disabilities

Level:	3
Unit type:	Optional
Credit value:	4
Guided learning hours:	28

Unit introduction

The purpose of this unit is for learners to understand the importance of finding meaningful ways to communicate with people with learning disabilities, who may also be autistic, and for learners to develop the skills required to do this. The unit is aimed at those whose role includes providing direct support to individuals. This unit covers barriers to communication and how they may be overcome. It looks at alternative and augmentative communication practices and gives a basic understanding of how these might be used. For many people with learning disabilities, good communication is the foundation to good support. By understanding that each person has their own individual needs and exploring simple changes that they can make in their everyday practice, learners will gain skills to improve the quality of life of the people with learning disabilities they support.

Learning outcomes and assessment criteria

To pass this unit, learners need to demonstrate that they can meet all the learning outcomes for the unit. The assessment criteria determine the standard required to achieve the unit.

Learning outcomes	Assessment criteria
1 Understand the importance of effective communication for people with learning disabilities	1.1 Describe the importance of communication for people with learning disabilities as a key to independence and empowerment 1.2 Explain why, without effective communication, people's physical and mental health are at risk 1.3 Explain non-verbal and alternative methods of communication

Learning outcomes	Assessment criteria
	1.4 Explain how the 'means, reasons and opportunities' model can be applied to common scenarios in own setting
2 Understand barriers to communicating with people with learning disabilities	2.1 Describe the conditions of successful communication 2.2 Explain how external factors, including the environment and attitudinal responses, can affect communication 2.3 Explain how different conditions may create additional barriers for communication, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - autism - visual impairments - hearing impairments - physical disabilities - mental health problems
3 Understand how to overcome communication barriers	3.1 Describe potential barriers to communication in own workplace setting 3.2 Describe solutions to potential barriers in own workplace setting 3.3 Evaluate opportunities in own workplace to expand the possibilities of individuals to communicate
4 Understand how to use a communication support plan and when to ask for additional support	4.1 Describe what a communication support plan is 4.2 Describe how to refer for speech and language input if a communication support plan is not working 4.3 Explain what information can be found in a communication passport and how it should be used
5 Be able to use a range of communication methods and styles to meet individual communication needs	5.1 Describe what a total communication approach is 5.2 Describe how each of the following communication methods can be used in a specific situation in own work setting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - spoken language-based communication - symbol-based communication - non-verbal communication

Learning outcomes	Assessment criteria
	<p>5.3 Demonstrate own adaptations to communication styles with individuals, explaining why these adaptations are appropriate to the relevant individuals</p> <p>5.4 Demonstrate 'easy-read' communication, giving examples of when and how it should be used</p>
<p>6 Be able to use non-verbal communication strategies to support individuals</p>	<p>6.1 Describe the complexities in communicating with someone who is non-verbal or who has profound and multiple learning disabilities</p> <p>6.2 Explain the following communication strategies and how each may be employed in own work setting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - objects of reference - communication aids - intensive interaction - multi-sensory environments - sensory stories - OWL (observe, wait, listen) <p>6.3 Demonstrate person-centred use of non-verbal communication strategies to support individuals</p>

Unit content

What needs to be learned

Learning outcome 1: Understand the importance of effective communication for people with learning disabilities

1A The importance of communication for people with learning disabilities

The function of communication, e.g. reasons, purpose, how it feels when communication fails.

Effects of communication on independence and empowerment, in terms of:

- education
- employment
- relationships
- transport
- health and wellbeing
- choices
- quality of life.

How failures of communication can put physical and mental health at risk:

- isolation and loneliness
- non-identification of physical health issues, such as pain
- mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression
- behaviours of concern, such as self-harm or harm to others.

1B Non-verbal and alternative methods of communication

Non-verbal communication: any form of communication other than spoken communication, including body movements, eye pointing, facial expression, smell, touch, gesture – e.g. gesturing at an object to indicate interest; offering the opportunity to smell or touch something before introducing a new activity; pointing to a place to show where they want to go; asking questions and offering options to gauge someone's interest or preference.

Symbol-based communication: symbols, drawings, photographs, props or objects, communication books – e.g. using a symbol-based communication system such as Widgit; having a photographic timetable; giving someone a pair of shoes to indicate they are going out (object of reference).

Language-based communication: verbal (vocalisations and spoken words), written – e.g. yes/no questions; text messages or emails; simple sentences; repeating something back to check understanding.

1C The 'means, reasons and opportunities' model of communication

What needs to be learned

Means – How? e.g. speech, signs, symbols, facial expression, gesture, touch, behaviour, vocalisations, written word, objects of reference, eye contact, body movement, physical posture.

Reasons – Why? e.g. basic needs, request/refuse, express feelings, get attention, give and receive information, make and maintain relationships, socialise.

Opportunities – When/Where/Who with? e.g. time and space, making choices, people and environment responsive to individual, shared 'language' and interests.

Learning outcome 2: Understand barriers to communicating with people with learning disabilities

2A The conditions of successful communication

- Two-way process
- Shared communication method/mode
- Authentic self and self-awareness
- Motivations and opportunities to communicate.

2B Communication barriers associated with common conditions that may affect those with learning disabilities

Autism – literal speech/thinking, hyper/hypo-sensitivities, double empathy problem, social norms, environmental factors, theory of mind.

Visual impairments – need to use alternative communication, e.g. braille, text to speech, colour contrast, large print/font, support people, objects of reference.

Hearing impairments – need to use alternative communication, e.g. hearing aids, cochlear implants, British Sign Language, Makaton (key word signing), pictures and written words, subtitles, lip reading, text messages, visual clues.

Physical disabilities – attitudinal barriers, physical barriers, access issues, lack of understanding of communication aids.

Mental health problems – attitudinal barriers, need for support, memory loss issues, barriers due to behaviour, motivation to communicate.

Learning outcome 3: Understand how to overcome communication barriers

3A Potential communication barriers

- Barriers may include: environmental noise or disruption, attitudinal barriers, access issues, access to adaptive tools, knowledge and understanding of colleagues, time to implement changes, equipment to implement changes, shared knowledge of someone's chosen method of communication
- Resolving barriers may include: finding a quiet space or establishing a quiet space, using communication profiles or passports, accessing adaptive tools,

What needs to be learned

using creative ways to communicate, taking time to understand and listen, education of colleagues.

3B Opportunities in own workplace to expand the possibilities of individuals to communicate, e.g.:

- making communication person-centred
- making communication at the right level for the individual
- providing visual resources to support understanding and expressive communication
- providing quiet times for focused communication
- giving everyone the chance to communicate, not just dominant voices
- minimising background noise (such as radio or TV)
- providing spaces for communicating that are not crowded or with other sensory distractions
- finding reasons to communicate.

Learning outcome 4: Understand how to use a communication support plan and when to ask for additional support

4A Communication support plans and how they are used

A communication support plan as defined by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists should include:

- how the individual understands communication from others
- how the individual expresses communication to others
- how to tell if the individual is unwell/in pain
- which communication and behaviour is intentional
- how the individual takes part in communication with others
- the best times and people to communicate important information
- what could change in the individual's environment/support to enhance communication experiences
- other aspects that have an impact on communication for that individual.

4B How to refer for speech and language input

- Routes: direct referral to the Community Learning Disability Team for Speech and Language Therapy; in-house speech and language dedicated roles
- Information to give to the person making an assessment.

4C Communication passports and their importance

- How a communication passport differs from a communication support plan:
 - Communication passport is likely to include more personal information

What needs to be learned

- Communication support plan may include goals for others and the environment to enhance communication experiences
- o Benefits of communication passport, e.g.:
- not limited to support network: useful for health professionals, colleagues or new friendships
- includes information to support participation in activities, e.g. mobility, eating and drinking, supporting with new experiences
- includes likes and dislikes
- travels with the individual for use whenever interacting with someone new
- o Similar tools to help support and develop communication environment.

Learning outcome 5: Be able to use a range of communication methods and styles to meet individual communication needs

5A A total communication approach

Using a range of communication approaches that work best for an individual; supporting or replacing the use of spoken and written language with alternative and augmentative approaches, e.g. signs, symbols, photographs, objects of reference, gesticulation, body language, communication devices.

5B Easy read and its use

- o Creating effective easy read:
 - simple language
 - size 14 or larger font
 - sans serif font (e.g. Arial)
 - ensuring pictures match text
 - use of glossary for complex words or concepts
 - breaking down and simplifying information
 - retaining all key points.
- o When easy read should be used: not as a replacement for total communication or individualised approaches; when creating generic documents for a wide-ranging audience of people with learning disabilities, e.g. documents for a group of people, such as 'about our organisation' or policy documents.

Learning outcome 6: Be able to use non-verbal communication strategies to support individuals

6A Communicating with someone who is non-verbal or who has profound and multiple learning disabilities

What needs to be learned

- Importance of understanding individual's communication needs
- Using a total communication approach
- Focusing on non-verbal techniques
- Attuned interaction (receiving and then responding in the person's preferred way, pausing and creating space for communication, being person-led and less instructional)
- Making time for relationship-based communication
- Making communication fun, inviting and low demand
- Risks when someone is not given opportunities to communicate and interact: harm to their wellbeing and health; loneliness and isolation; neglect.

6B Strategies for working with individuals who are non-verbal

- *Objects of reference* – using an object to reference a task or activity
- *Communication aids* – simple, e.g. a pictorial schedule; complicated, e.g. text-to-speech equipment
- *Intensive interaction* – imitating behaviour, responding, mirroring as a basis for communication and interaction
- *Multi-sensory environments* – using the environment to stimulate a sensory response, either in designated 'sensory spaces' or in individual's home or bedroom
- *Sensory stories* – using senses to tell a story piece by piece
- *OWL (observe, wait, listen)* – strategy for understanding PMLD/non-verbal communication.

Essential information for tutors and assessors

Essential resources

There are no special resources needed for this unit.

Assessment

This unit is internally assessed. To pass the unit, the evidence that learners present for assessment must demonstrate that they have met the required standard specified in the learning outcomes and assessment criteria.

It is expected that this unit will be assessed in a real or simulated working environment, where evidence is naturally occurring and collected over a period of time.

Centres are responsible for deciding on the assessment activities that will enable learners to produce valid, sufficient, authentic and appropriate evidence to meet the assessment criteria.

The unit is assessed by a portfolio of evidence. Further information on the requirements for portfolios is included in *Section 4 Assessment requirements*.

Wherever possible, centres should adopt a holistic and integrated approach to assessing the skills units in the qualification. This gives the assessment process greater rigour, minimises repetition and saves time. The focus should be on assessment activities generated through naturally occurring evidence in the workplace rather than on specific tasks. Taken as a whole, the evidence must show that learners meet all learning outcomes and assessment criteria over a period of time. It should be clear in the assessment records where each learning outcome and assessment criterion has been covered and achieved.

Unit assessment requirements

This unit must be assessed in accordance with Skills for Care and Development's Assessment Principles in *Annexe A*.

Assessment decisions for learning outcomes 5 and 6 (competence) must be made based on evidence generated during the learner's normal work activity. Any knowledge evidence integral to these learning outcomes may be generated outside of the work environment, but the final assessment decision must be within the real work environment. Simulation cannot be used as an assessment method for learning outcomes 5 and 6.

Assessment of learning outcomes 1, 2, 3 and 4 (knowledge) may take place in or outside of a real work environment.

Suggested resources

This section lists resource materials that can be used to support the delivery of the qualification.

Websites

[aacbooks.net/books/AdaptingLowTech/
#_low_tech_aac](https://aacbooks.net/books/AdaptingLowTech/#_low_tech_aac)

Visual examples of different types of low-tech AAC

booksbeyondwords.co.uk

Wordless picture stories co-created with and for people who find pictures easier to understand than words

communicationmatters.org.uk

Communication Matters is the UK chapter of the International Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication (ISAAC)

ghll.org.uk/Principles%20of%20Attunement

Principles of attunement

leedsandyorkpft.nhs.uk/advice-support/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2019/02/An-Introduction-to-Intensive-Interaction-2019.pdf

Intensive interaction resource

mencap.org.uk/learning-disability-explained/communicating-people-learning-disability

Guidance on communicating with people with a learning disability – PDF and video of people with learning disability talking about communication

mencap.org.uk/sites/default/files/2016-12/Communicating%20with%20people_updated%20%281%29.pdf#:~:text=%E2%80%A2%20In%20person%3Amany%20people%20with%20a%20learning%20disability,keep%20writing%20at%20a%20minimum%20of%2016%20point

Guide to communicating with people with a learning disability

pmlldlink.org.uk/

A journal for those supporting people with profound and multiple learning disabilities, with a helpful resources page

oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/oxtc/resources/Communication%20Bill%20of%20Rights.pdf

Communication Bill of Rights

rcslt.org/wp-content/uploads/media/Project/RCSLT/good-comm-standards.pdf

Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists: five good communication standards

rcslt.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/20162209_InclusiveComms_final.pdf

Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists: Position Paper – Inclusive Communication and the Role of Speech and Language Therapy

talkingmats.com/category/blog

An interactive resource that uses three sets of picture communication symbols – topics, options and a visual scale. Website includes blogs and articles

thesensoryprojects.co.uk/sensory-stories

Concise text partnered with strong sensory stimuli to convey a narrative