



baptist
care sa



4

EFFECTIVE communication

Relationships start with communication

One of the most useful ways to support people with disabilities is to communicate effectively with them and their carers.

Communicating involves exchanging ideas, thoughts, feelings and information, so the communication is understood by the receiver as it was intended by the giver of the message.

If the message is not understood, we have failed in our communication. Different styles and methods of communication are needed for different disabilities. The first and most important thing you can do to ensure effective communication is have a conversation with the person and/or their carer about their preferred style and method of communication, listen well, and respond accordingly.

“May my words and my thoughts be acceptable to you, O LORD...”

Psalm 19:14a, Holy Bible (GNT)¹⁰



One in five Australians report that they live with a disability, so there are people in your church living with a disability. Additionally, about 7.3 million Australians have literacy skills at Level 2 or lower (from 6 levels). Naturally we want to enable every person to flourish in our community and our churches, so we need to consider how to clearly communicate with everyone. This guide presents you with tips and resources to achieve that.

TOP TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL COMMUNICATION^{3,4}

Tan's carers have provided tips for successful communication that have greater application. These include:

- **Be respectful:** Tan struggles with communication so respect her efforts.
- **Always ask:** Tan or her carer will tell you what helps to improve communication.
- **Ask if you can't understand:** Don't pretend you have understood. Let her know you are having difficulty. Ask her to repeat once, or try another way if she has not understood your request. It can be helpful to ask her simple questions she can answer with a yes or no, to get important information.

(There will be some people who do not like eye contact E.g. some Aboriginal people, some people with autism spectrum disorders).

- **If you ask a question, wait for a response:** If you think Tan has not understood, repeat what you asked, or say it in a different way. If possible speak to Tan in a quiet place and listen attentively. Be patient and give her time to respond.
- **Speak naturally.** Don't raise your voice, Tan's hearing is not the issue. Speak at a normal volume and pace.
- **Ask a carer:** Tan cannot always tell you what she needs because she can't recall the words. I suggest you should ask a carer to assist with communication if you continue to have difficulty communicating.

TOP TIPS FOR CLEAR VERBAL COMMUNICATION^{3,4,5}

- **Organise** your key message
- **Use Easy English:** let Tan know what you are thinking using plain language and common words in 'Easy English', and avoiding jargon. Easy English helps any person with low English literacy to access information.
- **Written back up:** Use simple written information as a back-up for Tan's carer if this is needed.
- **Body language:** Keep your focus on Tan to see how the information is being received. This may be conveyed by her body language.
- **Respond accordingly:** Check Tan understands and respond accordingly.

TOP TIPS FOR CLEAR WRITTEN COMMUNICATION^{6,7,8}

- **Plan:** Note your key messages and organise them in logical sequence with the most important message first in each section. Structure using headings, subheadings and bullet points.
- **Write directly to your audience:** Use an active, conversational voice and a positive tone to explain the purpose of the document.
- **Tense:** Write in present tense wherever possible.

Meet Tan

Tan lives with a mild intellectual disability and enjoys speaking with people. She can find communication a challenge, but when the language is simple and clear, Tan gets it! Tan wants people to find simple ways to communicate with her so she can understand. "Tan can't speak easily but that does not mean Tan has nothing to say. Her need for effective communication is no different than my need or your need..." says Tan's brother.

- **Use inclusive everyday language:** 'Easy English' has key features that include:
 - › Images to explain your key message/s
 - › Use of plain language and grammar that uses common words and short sentences
 - › Minimal punctuation
 - › Choose clear, easy to read fonts
 - › Text colour that contrasts with background
 - › Text that is left justified and uncrowded
 - › 2.5 cm margins and white space on the page
 - › Bullet points to break up text and highlight important points
- **Provide only key information.** One idea in one sentence.
- **Order:** Write instructions in the order that you want them carried out.
- **Examples:** Explain meaning using common examples.
- **Visuals:** Give context by using visuals.
- **Consistent messaging:** Write messages in the same grammatical format.
- **Appearance:** Pay attention to what the text looks like on the page. Use illustrations: images, graphics that add meaning to the text.
- **Use accessible or tagged PDFs:** that can be read by people with vision impairment using screen readers.
- **Test:** Run your content by your target group.

- **Check your document:** Use tools like the Plain Language G.R.I.D.⁹ below:

Grade Level

- › Is the information written at a Grade 4-6 level?

Relevance

- › Is the information accurate, up-to-date and complete?
- › Is the information what the person needs/wants to know?
- › Is the information sensitive to the person's gender, culture or ethnicity?

Interest

- › Is the information written in a friendly conversational style?
- › Is the information organised logically?
- › Is the information written with plain words?
- › Are important ideas repeated?

Design

- › Does the layout use white space? (The page is not too crowded)
- › Is the font size 12 point or larger?
- › Is the font appropriate (many people prefer serif font such as Times, Courier, Palatino, New York because it is easier to read)
- › Is the text left justified so space does not interrupt flow?
- › Do illustrations help make the message clear?
- › If the answer to more than three of these questions is no, many adults with low literacy skills may find the material difficult to read and use.

USEFUL RESOURCES FOR DISABILITY-FRIENDLY COMMUNICATION

AGOSCI inclusive group interested in enhancing participation of people with complex communication needs, <https://www.agosci.org.au>

Anabaptist Disability Network has many resources, <https://www.anabaptistdisabilitiesnetwork.org/Resources/Pages/All-Resources.aspx>

AUSLAN has a sign bank and finger spelling guide, <http://www.auslan.org.au>

Communication Matters UK many resources on communication, <https://www.communicationmatters.org.uk>

Grammar Girl Get grammar tips for easy to read style, www.quickanddirtytips.com/grammar-girl

National Relay Service relay calls for hearing impaired, <https://www.communications.gov.au/what-we-do/phone/services-people-disability/accesshub/national-relay-service>

Arj is a skilled cabinet maker. He is also profoundly deaf. Arj uses AUSLAN and lip reading to communicate. He used to attend church with the SA deaf community but since he has two hearing children, he wants to participate in his local church as a family. Arj is helped by receiving sermons that are in clearly written, easy English and his church is happy to provide these notes for Arj. Other members also use the notes now because they have mild to moderate hearing impairment due to ageing, so meeting Arj's communication needs is enabling others to engage more fully.

Oxford Practice Grammar Site grammar and spelling help for plain English documents, <https://elt.oup.com/student/practicegrammar/?cc=global&sellLanguage=en> and www.oxforddictionaries.com/words/better-writing

SCOPE Victorian site to assist with disability issues and communication, <https://www.scopeaust.org.au/information-resources-hub/resources-download>

The 'Connecting Me' Tool Kit (SCOPE)

Tool Kit has two parts, Part 1: strategies and resources to develop co-designed support with people who have communication difficulties. Part 2: fact sheets, templates and communication aids for download. These tools may help you create individualised communication plans to optimise inclusion. These tools may help you create an individual plan for the person with disability in your church, so communication optimises access and inclusion opportunities, <https://www.scopeaust.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Toolkit-Part-1.pdf>

<https://www.scopeaust.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Toolkit-Part-2.pdf>

The 'Bridging Project' (SCOPE)

Easy English Fact Sheets such as 'Understanding behaviours of concern' which would be very helpful for churches, <https://www.scopeaust.org.au/information-resources-hub/resources-download/bridging-project>

26TEN, 'Communicate Clearly: A Guide to Plain English', <https://www.nds.org.au/images/resources/resource-files/26TEN-Communicate-Clearly-2016.pdf>

There are more useful accessibility resources at www.baptistcaresa.org.au/connections **with live links to the websites**



130 Rose Terrace
Wayville SA 5034

08 8273 7100
baptistcaresa.org.au

