

Communicating effectively with people with cognitive disability

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Thinking about Disability

Q; What does a person with a 'disability' mean to you?

Think about how your personal and professional experiences, as well as community views and expectations of people with disabilities, affects this definition.



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Cognitive Disability/Impairment

- Cognitive disability/impairment is a term used to describe a wide variety of impaired brain functions relating to ongoing impairment in comprehension, reason, adaptive functioning, judgement, learning or memory that is the result of any damage to, dysfunction, developmental delay, or deterioration of the brain or mind.
- It can be associated with many disabilities and disorders that can be present at birth or acquired later in life, and can apply to a range of severity in impairment, from mild through to severe



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Cognitive disability can be used to incorporate a number of conditions:

- Intellectual Disability
- Acquired Brain Injuries
- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
- Dementia



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Possible indicators of cognitive disability

- Short attention span
- Difficulty understanding questions and instructions
- Limited vocabulary: may mimic responses or answers
- Inability to read or write, or very limited literacy
- May answer, 'yes' to all questions asked
- May have difficulty giving a personal history
- May not want disability to be noticed



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Disability or Impairment?

Social model of understanding disability

● **Impairment** is a medical condition that leads to disability;
while

● **Disability** is the result of the interaction between people living with impairments and barriers in the physical, attitudinal, communication and social environment.

(<http://www.pwd.org.au/student-section/the-social-model-of-disability.html>)



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Disability

Accessibility

Ability

- What are some examples of physical, attitudinal, communication and social barriers?



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Cognitive Impairment can affect

- Å Judgement and decision making
- Å Short term memory
- Å Self regulation
- Å Concentration
- Å Insight into self and others



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People with cognitive impairment may have difficulty

- Learning and recalling skills
- Following instructions
- Recognise cause and effect
- Perform physical and cognitive tasks



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Cognitive impairment can lead to

- Anxiety when hurried
- Confusion when faced with multiple facts or choices
- Disordered style and content of communication
- Reduced inhibitions
- Risk taking



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Some common communication difficulties

- Expressive communication (ability to get their message across)
- Receptive communication (ability to understand what others are saying to them)

What can happen when expressive communication is better than receptive communication?



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Some common communication difficulties

- Recency (may only remember the last thing you say to them)
- Suggestibility (can be easily led during conversation)
- Acquiescence (will agree with things to please people, particularly authority figures).

How does this impact on your work?



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Following verbal instructions

In order to respond to instructions you need to be able to:

1. attend to and hear
2. remember
3. work out the important bits
4. understand the words and meaning
5. work out what response is required
6. remember
7. sequence and perform

Does this explain some non-compliance?



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Providing a more accessible service

- Recognise disability and support needs
- Choose your language carefully, use plain English
- Take time
- Check for understanding
- Say it again / Remind the person
- Use more than one type of communication i words, diagrams, pictures, calendars



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Provide an accessible environment

- Letters, Signage and other information
- Choosing the right words
- Familiarity (can the person visit prior to hearing?)
- Noise and other distractions
- Taking Breaks
- The right support person
- Staff attitudes



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Providing more accessible service

- Frame information in positives i What TO do i rather than negatives
- Consider whether the person has appropriate support
- Consider that the person may need help to put new information into practice
- Can you plan for follow up?
- Use plain English
- Consider where to use easy English



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What is plain English?

A communication is in plain English if its

- wording,
- structure, and
- design

are so clear that the intended audience can easily

- find what they need,
- understand what they find, and
- use that information.

<http://plainlanguagenetwork.org/>



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Plain English writing:

- is respectful of the reader
- is appropriate to your audience (who they are and what relationship you want to have with them)
- draws on common, everyday language
- explains technical words in everyday language
- attempts to interest readers and hold their attention.

<https://www.plainenglish.com.au/about-plain-english>



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What is Easy English?

Easy English is writing for people who do **not** have functional literacy.



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Easy English is:-

- Writing in everyday words
- Using simple sentence structure
- Supporting the messages with meaningful and clear images
- Having functional consumer reviews of products and company information
- Being clear about marketing versus information messages.

<http://accesseasyenglish.com.au/what-is-easy-english/>

<http://www.nswcid.org.au/hire-us/easy-read-materials.html>



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You can make a difference

- Accessibility is a whole range of big and small changes
- Don't ever give up hope
- Always try to make things more accessible

Remember: People have a right to accessible services



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An Example: Where longer term planning may be needed!!

- I have a cognitive impairment.
- I have basic literacy and computer skills.
- I want to make a general NCAT application and I can't afford to pay the application fee.
- <http://www.ncat.nsw.gov.au/>



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Questions?

- Thank you
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