



Five good communication standards

Reasonable adjustments to communication

'Transforming Care: A national response to Winterbourne View Hospital' found failings around how we care for people with learning disabilities and/or autism with complex needs, identifying the need for better outcomes for individuals.

Most people with learning disabilities have speech, language and communication difficulties. However, the role of good communication as key to achieving better outcomes for individuals is often hidden or overlooked. Communication is a significant risk factor contributing to increased mental health issues and behaviour described as challenging.

Everyone needs to know what good communication support 'looks like' and what reasonable adjustments they can make. Failure to make these reasonable adjustments to meet communication needs will mean people with learning disabilities will continue to be vulnerable to a range of risks. Good communication enables inclusive relationships, supporting individuals to have choice, control, greater independence and improved health outcomes. Sustainable improvements in communication can only be achieved through a 'whole systems approach'

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) recommend five good practice standards to meet the speech, language and communication needs of individuals. These standards provide a practical framework by which families, carers, friends, professionals and commissioners can know if a service has made reasonable adjustments to their communication practice. Each standard is clearly defined in terms of what the standard is, what good looks like and how others will know it has been achieved. Useful resources and references are also included.

Good communication should involve a wide range of tools, techniques and technologies to support individuals to understand, express feelings and needs, and involve themselves in the world around them. The support needed will vary from person to person but the outcome for an individual should mean they can say:

- Whatever communication methods work best for me are used and valued by others.
- People communicate effectively with me because of their underpinning knowledge, skills and attitude.
- People actively listen to me and take time to support my communication.
- I get the professional support I need to enable me to communicate to my full potential.
- The communication tools, techniques or technology I need are freely available to me throughout my life.
- Policies and strategies that affect me take into account my communication and include me in appropriate ways.

For further information: www.rcslt.org

The Five Good Communication Standards

Standard 1: There is a detailed description of how best to communicate with individuals.

Everyone understands and values individual's speech, language and communication needs. Individuals are supported and involved, together with the people who know them best, to develop a rich description of the best ways to interact together. This description is agreed, active, regularly updated and readily available. This description may be referred to as a communication passport, guideline or profile. It includes the best ways of supporting understanding and expression, promoting interaction and involvement and describes 'how to be with someone'.

Standard 2: Services demonstrate how they support individuals with communication needs to be involved with decisions about their care and their services.

Service providers recognise that people understand and express themselves in different ways. For individuals this means getting information and expressing themselves in ways that meet their needs. 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'. For services to demonstrate inclusion and involvement innovative and creative solutions to understanding the views of individuals are often required.

Standard 3: Staff value and use competently the best approaches to communication with each individual

Staff recognise communication difficulties. They understand that they need to change their communication style to support the service user, and have the knowledge and skills to adapt their communication levels, styles and methods. Staff are aware of factors that impact on communication, especially hearing, sight and sensory integration. Staff know that how they are, what they think and how they say things matters. Staff understand how good communication underpins informed consent and capacity.

Standard 4: Services create opportunities, relationships and environments that make individuals want 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 contributes to enabling people to live value and meaningful lives. 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. Interaction is a way of 'being' with another person, making meaningful contact with those who are hard to reach or easy to ignore.

Standard 5: Individuals are supported to understand and express 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. 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.