



Mandatory training on learning disability and autism in England 10 February 2020

Key facts

- Communication disability in the UK affects millions of people. Up to 20% of the UK's population experience communication difficulty at some point in their lives¹ and more than 10% of all children and young people have a long term communication need.²
- Amongst people with learning disability the figure is much higher. Up to 80% of people may have a speech, language and communication difficulty.³ Autistic people often experience difficulty with communicating and interacting with people.⁴

The impact

- Communication is not simply about the ability to speak but also the ability to hear and understand what is said to us. This lies at the very core of human dignity. The impact of communication difficulties and disabilities is varied; some people may find it hard to ask a question, name an object or ask for help, while others may have speech difficulties that make them difficult to understand. Some people may use communication devices and require time to create their message, whilst others may have difficulty understanding what is said to them and problems with processing information.
- Communication disabilities potentially leave millions without a voice, denying them equality of access and opportunity.

Training

- Communication skills are fundamental and foundational. They enable us to understand and to be understood and underpin social interaction. They are central to our development, our ability to understand and manage our emotions, to form relationships, our achievement and life chances.
- All staff working with people with learning disability or autism need to know what good communication support 'looks like' and what reasonable adjustments they could make.
- Staff need to be aware of how people with learning disability or autism 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.

Communication breakdown

- When the communication needs of people with learning disability or autism are not identified and supported, this can negatively impact on both their physical and mental health.
- Securing appropriate health and care support can be difficult if a person cannot describe their signs and symptoms easily. Limited communication reduces people's capacity to convey health and care needs effectively to others, resulting in poorer health.
- Securing appropriate health and care support can be difficult if someone's behaviour is misunderstood and misconstrued.

Recommendations from the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists

- We strongly recommend that the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists' **Five Good Communication Standards** are embedded into all staff learning to show the reasonable adjustments that people with learning disability or autism can expect.
- The Standards were developed in response to Winterbourne View and this learning needs to be shared amongst all professionals. They provide a practical framework by which families, carers, professionals and commissioners can support a service to make reasonable adjustments to their communication practice. The Standards include checklists for staff to be able to demonstrate that they have achieved each of the standards. There is also an Easy Read version so people receiving services know what good communication looks like and whether good communication is happening.

Communication training

- Communication Access UK is an initiative led by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists in partnership with the Stroke Association, Headway – the brain injury association, the Motor Neurone Disease Association, Communication Matters, the National Network of Parent Carer Forums, Disability Rights UK and the Business Disability Forum.
- Communication Access UK is about improving the lives of people living with communication disabilities.
- Across the last three years, we have been working to introduce a new symbol for disability access – the Communication Access Symbol to the UK, which is akin to pre-existing disability access symbols such as the wheelchair access symbol and the visual and hearing impaired symbols.
- This has been developed (with underpinning standards) after a national service user oriented consultation, which received over 5,500 responses.
- For an organisation to be accredited as ‘Communication Accessible’ staff must be trained in the application of those standards.
- The symbol and training package have been tested rigorously across UK throughout 2018 and we are officially launching in Summer 2020.
- This communication training could be rolled out to all health and social care staff at a universal level to increase their skills and understanding of communication difficulties and learning disability and autism.

References

- 1 Law, J., van der Gaag, A., Hardcastle, W. J., Beckett, D. J, MacGregor, A., and Plunkett, C. (2007) Communication Support Needs: a Review of the Literature. Scottish Executive.
- 2 Norbury, C.F., Gooch, D., Wray, C., Baird, G., Charman, T., Simonoff, E., Vamvakas, A. and Pickles, A. (2016) The impact of nonverbal ability on prevalence and clinical presentation of language disorder: evidence from a population study. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 57(11): 1247-1257.
- 3 Enderby P and Davies P. *Communication Disorders: planning a service to meet the needs.* BJDC 1989; 24, 151-166.
- 4 RCSLT (2009) *Resource Manual for Commissioning and Planning Services for SLCN: Autism Spectrum Disorders.*
- 5 For more on the Five Good Communication Standards see below and <https://bit.ly/3bjCO9E>

| The Five Good Communication Standards | | |
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| Standard | For professionals | For people receiving services |
| 1 | There is a detailed description of how best to communicate with individuals. | There is good information that tells people how best to communicate with me. |
| 2 | Services demonstrate how they support individuals with communication needs to be involved with decisions about their care and their services. | Staff help me to be involved in making decisions about my care and support. |
| 3 | Staff value and use competently the best approaches to communication with each individual they support. This includes staff changing their own communication style to support the person. | Staff are good at supporting me with my communication. |
| 4 | Services create opportunities, relationships and environments that make individuals want to communicate. | I have lots of chances to communicate. |
| 5 | Individuals are supported to understand and express their needs in relation to their health and wellbeing. | Staff help me to understand and communicate about my health. |