

10 tips for colleges, employers and agencies working with young people who have communication difficulties.



FOCUS ON THE POSITIVE

Young people with communication difficulties tend to be straightforward, reliable, conscientious workers who actually like routine/protocols!

They need more determination and strength of character than most to succeed in a language-dominated society.

WELCOME!

None of us work to our best if we are being harassed or feel people don't like or appreciate us.

Provide a genuine welcome and try to ensure inclusion in social gatherings.

Check anti-bullying/harassment policies are in place and operating. Provide a buddy/mentor for at least six-months and longer if needed.

Provide regular feedback on performance - emphasising positives.

MAKE IT VISUAL

Always provide visual back-up to support verbal instructions and improve memory.

Diagrams, charts and bullet-points, rather than paragraphs of text.

Keep pages uncluttered but don't be afraid to include a high level of detail in any checklists/protocols/induction programme etc.

Use colour-coding and icons to highlight or categorise information.

BE EXPLICIT

None of us are mind-readers, least of all people with communication difficulties who tend to act on the information that's immediately in front of them.

In addition, people with language difficulties often process only what's said, rather than drawing inferences from the words, body-language, social manner or situation which make up the complete context.

Reduce need for inference by giving detailed guidance and being clear about your expectations.

Apply this rule to both inter-personal skills and performance-related matters. It's essential to know about any issues with colleagues and how to address them.

ALLOW MORE TIME

Needing more time does not mean lack of intelligence.

Allow more time to absorb information, answer questions, respond when spoken to, and to contribute.

Provide means of contributing ideas after as well as during a meeting/discussion.

Pace induction programme over longer timescale than usual, with more breaks for consolidation.

THE RAIN IN SPAIN...

Speaking clearly so that you get your message across is not about speaking s-l-o w-l-y or over-enunciating, and it's DEFINITELY not about shouting!

Simply avoid running all your words together. Make key-words and pieces of information stand out by pausing before and after them.

This will be particularly important if you have an unfamiliar accent or dialect, as the individual could take a long time to 'tune in'.

CHECK UNDERSTANDING

Don't wait for students/employees to seek clarification, always check understanding and ask if they'd like repetition. Encourage questioning as a positive move, rather than saying - come to me if you have any problems.

ASK WHAT HELPS

We all have different ways of doing things and no-one knows their preferred learning-style better than ourselves! Ask individuals what learning technique, memory strategy and form of expression works best for them.

SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Just as we need to know where the Help-desk, guide or Tourist Office is when we are lost or confused, so we need to know where, when and how to get help in the education or work-setting. This is particularly relevant if we are not able to seek clarification 'on the spot'.

Provide a combination of peer support (buddy/mentor), written guidelines and formal supervision with time to prepare questions before each meeting.

BE HONEST

Don't pretend you have understood an individual's speech or intention when you haven't. Work out a strategy together for what to do if you don't understand -writing/drawing/gesture/clues are all valid forms of communication and if all else fails, time-out can work wonders!

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