ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE

MEADOW COURT

LEARNING DISABILITIES

ACCESSING AND USING INFORMATION

16 Words that inform and signify-ACCESS + INFORMATION

Definition of learning Disability

A learning disability affects the way a person understands information and how they communicate. This means they can have difficulty: understanding new or complex information, learning new skills and coping independently

ACTION

CONTACT

ENQUIRE

SUMMISE

SURVEY

IDENTIFYING

NETWORKING

FINDING

OBSERVING

RELATING

MESSAGES

ADVISING

TELLING

INFORMING

ORIENTING

NOTIFYING

1. Access to information

1.1 Know how to identify and use information sources

Local Social Services can give advice about what local services are available.

People with learning disabilities

People with learning disabilities need good support from their earliest years if they are to reach their full potential. They are much more likely to receive good support if they have a say in the planning and delivery of services. Resources include a number of easy-read publications, including personalisation.

Adults with learning disabilities and access to services

It is vital to tackle discrimination and inequality of access for people with learning disabilities so that they have the same access to health and care services as everyone else. Professionals need to be aware of social inequalities, risk, potential for abuse, vulnerability and other challenges experienced by people with learning disabilities.

Personalisation and learning disabilities

People with learning disabilities have a lot to gain from increased choice and control. But people with high support needs could miss out if care staff do not have the right skills or there is no advocacy support available. Our resources provide advice on how to maximise choice and minimise risks.

Access to care for adults

It is vital to tackle discrimination and inequality of access for people with learning disabilities so that they have the same access to health and care services as everyone else. Professionals need to be aware of social inequalities, risk, potential for abuse, vulnerability and other challenges experienced by people with learning disabilities.

Autism

Outcomes for adults with autistic spectrum conditions (ASC) are generally poor. Many people with ASC experience unemployment; mental and physical ill-health, discrimination and social exclusion. Evidence suggests that adults with ASC benefit from services, e.g. employment and care, which adopt autism-specific approaches delivered via specialist, multi-disciplinary teams.

Shared Lives

Shared Lives schemes are one way of providing more personalised services. Schemes recruit, assess and support Shared Lives carers who offer accommodation and/or care and support to people who use services, older people, people with mental health problems and those with learning and/or physical disabilities, in their family home.

Adults and community based activities

Helping people with learning disabilities to achieve 'ordinary' daily lives has been national policy for more than 30 years, and significant progress has been made. But there's much more to do because many people still have a pattern of life that revolves around attending a day service.

Adults and self-advocacy

Self-advocacy should make a difference, not just in learning disability services, but in all areas of people' lives. People with a learning disability want a chance to talk about the things that are important to them – they don't just want to follow agendas set by other people.

Equality and disability

This includes physical disabilities, learning disabilities and mental health. The resources contained cover personalisation, dementia, mental capacity, parental mental health, older people, autistic spectrum conditions, innovation and recovery approaches.

Useful resources also include information on the following and can be accessed oln line:

- Abuse
- Advocacy
- Black and minority ethnic communities
- Communication
- Employment
- Family Carers
- Food and health
- Good Support
- Government
- Hate Crime
- Health
- Human Rights
- Housing
- Learning disabilities
- Managing Money
- Mental Health
- Mental Capacity Act
- Offenders and the Criminal Justice System
- Other areas
- Parenting
- Personalisation
- Positive Behaviour Support
- Profound and multiple learning disabilities
- Safeguarding
- Sexuality and relationships
- Young people and transition

1.2 Understand the relevance of information related legislation and best practice to your job

The Disability Discrimination Act

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 aims to end the discrimination that faces many people with disabilities. This Act has been significantly extended, including by the Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006 (DDO). It now gives people with disabilities rights in the areas of: employment.

- education
- access to goods, facilities and services, including larger private clubs and transport services
- buying or renting land or property, including making it easier for people with disabilities to rent property and for tenants to make disability-related adaptations
- functions of public bodies, for example issuing of licences

Human Rights Act

Summary
- The Human Rights Act 1998 (HRA) came into force in 2000.
- It creates no new rights, but enables human rights cases to be heard in United Kingdom (UK) courts or tribunals.
- The Act cannot be employed to take legal action against private individuals or bodies.
- It is designed to be used to bring court proceedings against public authorities where human rights have actually been breached or may potentially be infringed.
- It can also affect courts and tribunals in the way that their capacity as public authorities deal with cases involving private parties.
- The HRA applies to people with learning disabilities as equal citizens and has the potential to make a profound impact on their service provision, inclusion in society, and quality of life.

Best Practice

- People with Learning Disabilities have poorer and more complex health needs than the general population and have difficulties in communicating their needs and wishes.

- All workers should not assume that certain behaviours are part of having a Learning Disability and should **listen** to people who know the individual well and describe their behaviour as unusual or indicative of being in pain.

- Under the Disability Discrimination Act reasonable adjustments, such as taking more time with a person with Learning Disabilities and ensuring all service users documentation is in an easy read/accessible format, have to be made by all workers to ensure people with Learning Disabilities can access and receive the same high standards of healthcare as anyone else.

- Each person with Learning Disabilities will have different needs and require different levels of support (including access to advocates) to help them cope and get the best outcomes from their stay in supported living.

- Every service user should have a **support plan** in place which details good practice at each stage of the admission process and individual responsibilities in ensuring individuals with learning disabilities have appropriate support and care

- It is essential to complete an individualised assessment for each persons need for support and who is best placed to provide it. This is called a **Risk, Dependency and Support Assessment.** It is good practice to undertake this before the individual has entered the unit in order to ensure the correct level of support can established.

- It is the hospitals responsibility to fund any extra support over and above the individually funded support ordinarily available to the person in their own home. Any additional support has to be negotiated with the admission.

- In order to improve communication and care within a support environment between the workers and people with Learning Disabilities, there must be a **support plan and risk assessment** for recording key information about what people need to know about the individual.

1.3 Understand the differences between fact, assumption, hearsay and belief

A **fact** is something that has really occurred or is actually the case. The usual test for a statement of fact is verifiability, that is, whether it can be demonstrated to correspond to experience. Standard reference works are often used to check facts. Scientific facts are verified by repeatable experiments.

An **assumption** is an act of taking upon oneself. The act of possession or asserting a claim and something taken for granted or accepted without proof.

Hearsay is defined as an out-of-court statement offered to prove the truth of whatever it asserts. Hearsay evidence is often inadmissible at trial. However, many exclusions and exceptions exist. Evidence meeting the broad definition may not actually be hearsay under the court's evidence rules. Even hearsay may be admitted if exceptions are met.

A **Belief** is a state of the mind, treated in various academic disciplines, especially philosophy and psychology, as well as traditional culture, in which a subject roughly regards a thing to be <u>true</u>.

1.4 Understand how to gather and share information in an accessible format to enable decision making by:
- The individuals you support
- Yourself
- Family and carers
- All members of the individual's circle of support

1.5 Know how your own opinions or beliefs may influence the information you access and provide

When forming personal convictions, we often interpret factual evidence through the filter of our values, feelings, tastes, and past experiences. Hence, most statements we make in speaking and writing are assertions of fact, opinion, belief, or prejudice. The usefulness and acceptability of an assertion can be improved or diminished by the nature of the assertion, depending on which of the following categories it falls into:

A fact is verifiable. We can determine whether it is true by researching the evidence. This may involve numbers, dates, testimony, etc. (Ex.: "World War II ended in 1945.") The truth of the fact is beyond argument if one can assume that measuring devices or records or memories are correct. Facts provide crucial support for the assertion of an argument. However, facts by themselves are worthless unless we put them in context, draw conclusions, and, thus, give them meaning.

An opinion is a judgment based on facts, an honest attempt to draw a reasonable conclusion from factual evidence. (For example, we know that millions of people go without proper medical care, and so you form the opinion that the country should institute national health insurance even though it would cost billions of dollars.) An opinion is potentially changeable--depending on how the evidence is interpreted. By themselves, opinions have little power to convince. You must always let your reader know what your evidence is and how it led you to arrive at your opinion.

Unlike an opinion, a **belief is a conviction based on cultural or personal faith, morality, or values.** Statements such as "Capital punishment is legalized murder" are often called "opinions" because they express viewpoints, but they are not based on facts or other evidence. They cannot be disproved or even contested in a rational or logical manner. Since beliefs are inarguable, they cannot serve as the thesis of a formal argument. (Emotional appeals can, of course, be useful if you happen to know that your audience shares those beliefs.)

Another kind of assertion that has no place in serious argumentation is **prejudice, a half-baked opinion based on insufficient or unexamined evidence.** (Ex.: "Women are bad drivers.") Unlike a belief, a prejudice is testable: it can be contested and disproved on the basis of facts. We often form prejudices or accept them from others--family, friends, the media, etc.--without questioning their meaning or testing their truth. At best, prejudices are careless oversimplifications. At worst, they reflect a narrow-minded view of the world. Most of all, they are not likely to win the confidence or agreement of your readers.

Prejudice is prejudgment, or forming an opinion before becoming aware of the relevant facts of a case. The word is often used to refer to preconceived, usually unfavourable, judgments toward people or a person because of gender, political opinion, social
class, age, disability, religion, sexuality, race/ethnicity, language, nationality or other personal

characteristics. In this case, it refers to a positive or negative evaluation of another person based on their perceived group membership.[1] Prejudice can also refer to unfounded belief and may include "any unreasonable attitude that is unusually resistant to rational influence". A definition of prejudice as a "feeling, favourable or unfavourable, toward a person or thing, prior to, or not based on, actual experience".

1.6 Understand why it is important to keep a record of information accessed

Good record keeping, whether at an individual, team or organisational level, has many important functions. These include a range of clinical, administrative and educational uses such as:

- helping to improve accountability
- showing how decisions related to patient care were made
- supporting the delivery of services
- supporting effective clinical judgements and decisions
- supporting patient care and communications
- making continuity of care easier
- providing documentary evidence of services delivered
- promoting better communication and sharing of information between members of the multi-professional healthcare team
- helping to identify risks, and enabling early detection of complications
- supporting clinical audit, research, allocation of resources and performance planning
- helping to address complaints or legal processes.

2. Supporting individuals to access information

2.1 Know how to help individuals you support decide what information they need access to

Knowledge is power

"Access to information is the key to participating in society, achieving in education and gaining employment. The importance of access to information is reflected in its recognition as a fundamental human right, backed by legislation.

Over recent years and especially since the publication of 'Valuing People' there has been a growing commitment to the delivery of information in formats that are more easily accessible to people with learning disabilities.

Across public services there has been recognition and increased demand that people with learning disabilities should be able to access information. People with learning disabilities need to be able to understand information if they are to have more choice and control over their own lives and to become more active and equal citizens.

Access to good quality and meaningful information is especially important for people with learning disabilities and their families at crucial times of change in their lives, or when considering major life choices, such as:

- leaving school or college
- thinking about getting a job, both at school and beyond
- moving from one place to another, including moving out of a residential setting to supported living
- thinking about having a direct payment or personal budget
- becoming involved in a sexual relationship
- deciding to get married
- becoming a parent
- becoming a carer for another family member
- retirement.

Organisations have a duty to ensure that people with learning disabilities and their families can meaningfully access the information they need throughout their lives.

Easy Read is one way of making information more accessible to people with learning disabilities. Easy Read is also known as:

- Making information easier
- Easier to understand information
- Simple words and pictures
- Easy Write
- Easy Info
- Easy Access

Easy Read is not the only way to communicate with people with learning disabilities. Other methods include video, talks, presentations, drama, murals, role-play or posters.

Guiding principles for making information accessible

1. Ensure that people with learning disabilities are involved from the start.
2. Provide information through a range of channels and formats.
3. Ensure your information meets users' needs.
4. Clearly signpost to other services.
5. Always define responsibility for information provision.

Other common methods for sharing information with people with learning disabilities are described below.

Audio

Cassettes and CDs are popular among people with learning disabilities as they allow independent access to information (that is, without a support worker). Audio formats are commonly produced alongside printed information. CD has the advantage over cassette of being easier to navigate. The majority of people use CDs, however occasional requests for cassettes are still made. Once you have an audio version, it is also easy to add an mp3 to a website.

Video/DVD

Video and DVD can be useful formats for easy information as many people with learning disabilities are familiar with and enjoy watching TV and video. It also removes the barrier of the written word by being a visual and aural medium. Video can make positive use of role models and is a good way to bring information to life

Interactive CD-ROMs or web pages

These formats give visual and audio cues that aid comprehension and memory, allowing independent access to information. Moving images in particular can engage and involve people with learning disabilities in accessing information. You can also consider photostories to explain a policy or procedure.

2.2 Know a range of communication techniques to establish what assistance and information the individual requires

There are various forms and stages of communication.

Expressive language

Expressive language is the use of words to form sentences in order to communicate with other people. Difficulties in using expressive language to communicate can range from experiencing difficulties putting words in the right order or writing sentences, to being unable to form words in a meaningful way that others can understand. When someone is unable to make use of expressive language, this can lead to frustration at not being able to explain themselves, difficulty interacting with other people, and difficulty expressing their needs.

Receptive language

Receptive language is the understanding of expressive language. The use of receptive language is not dependent on being able to use expressive language. Some people may not be able to form words and sentences themselves, but are able to understand expressive language when it is used by others.
This can range from being able to easily understand what others say, to being able to only understand key words and phrases, and then only when they are spoken clearly and slowly. Everyone is different; some people may be able to use both receptive and expressive language to different degrees, whilst others may be able to use one or neither.

Communication techniques

Some people with learning disabilities have difficulties communicating with others when solely making use of expressive and receptive language. There are a variety of other techniques which have been developed to help support people for whom speech is difficult, for example:
- Communication systems such as <u>Widgit</u>, <u>Makaton</u> (based on British sign language), PECS (Picture Exchange communication system)
- Easy read symbols
- Speech and language therapy

People with learning disabilities often interpret body language and non-verbal communication in understanding simple everyday interactions. It is essential when communicating with someone with a learning disability to give them time to take in what is being said, and to communicate more slowly than you may normally in order to allow them to process what it is that you are communicating.

It is often hard to know what support is available to help people with learning disabilities communicate more easily.

Using visual guides or cues to aide communication is one important way of supporting people to have a greater understanding of what is being conveyed to them. One technique which can be helpful in everyday life is creating any materials or information in a more accessible format (this is often called easy read). Making something easy read involves breaking the text down into small sentences, and using images or symbols to convey what is being said in the text.

Carers/families

For people who work with or support people with learning disabilities, it is important to make sure that you are communicating in a way that is accessible for the recipient. Having information in easy read, using large font sizes and using simple language can be effective.

Often if a child with a learning disability is identified as having a severe barrier to communicating they will be offered help through their school, GP or through social services. If, however, either you or the person you support is not receiving the support they need to communicate effectively, see the right hand column for some useful resources able to provide advice.

2.3 Understand how to help individuals find information in the language and format of their choice

THINKING ABOUT PEOPLE

The person at the centre
Good communication depends on

- How well you can hear
- How well you can see
- How comfortable you are feeling
- How alert and attentive you are

- How well you can understand what is happening
- How well you can express yourself to someone else
- How interested and motivated you are to communicate.

People with learning disabilities often:-
- Have unidentified health needs that affect communication eg. hearing, vision, epilepsy; pain; physical difficulties that make communication effortful; medication affecting attention.
- Do not understand everything that is said to them

They may appear to understand, but actually be responding to your tone of voice, or familiar cues in the situation. They may misunderstand, forget or not catch some of what you say. They may often say "yes" in answering questions, even if they do not fully understand – partly because they do not want to make difficulties. They may not be able to contradict you if you have misunderstood what they mean or want. They may be bilingual, and have greater skills in one language than another.

- Use many different ways of communicating – Facial expressions, eye gaze, "body language", gestures, signs, communication books and charts with pictures or symbols, objects, electronic aids
- Need time to understand and respond to you. Some people take longer to process what you are saying. Others may find physical movement or speech effortful, so that it will take longer to respond.
- Interactive partners often overestimate the understanding of people with learning disabilities, and make their language too complicated. This puts too many demands on the person, who may withdraw, show challenging behaviour, or fail to do what is asked. Challenging behaviour is often caused by a person's failure to understand what is going on, or inappropriate demands from others.
- Interactive partners often do not use all the ways of communicating that are appropriate to the person. This means that a person's own communication system is not valued, and may deter them from using all their skills effectively.

REMEMBER
- People with learning disabilities are individuals. You need to try to look at things from their perspective. Remember, it is their agenda that is most important, not yours.
- People with learning disabilities have feelings, and are sensitive to situations,experiences and the attitudes of others. If they never experience successful communication, and fulfilling relationships that make them feel good about themselves, they may give up. They may be happy some days, and want to chat, or down some days, and prefer to be quiet – just like everyone else!

2.4 Know what techniques and equipment you could use to help the individuals you support understand information

What is Assistive Technology?

Assistive technology, also known as adaptive technology and AT, is any application or device that is used to increase, maintain or improve physical ability or academic performance. People generally think of mechanical devices, electronics, computers, hardware and software, but there is actually a range of assistive technology.

Low-tech Assistive Technology

- Pencil grips.
- Graph paper.
- Highlighting pens.
- Planners.
- Digital clocks.
- Calculators.
- Computers.
- Dictionaries and spell checkers.

Mid to Hi-tech Assistive Technology

- Digital recorders.
- Talking calculators.
- Portable keyboards.
- Electronic spell checkers and dictionaries.
- Reading systems that use a computer, scanner, and software to read scanned book pages out loud.
- Speech recognition software that allows a computer to operate by speaking to it.
- Mind mapping/outlining software.
- Global Positioning System (GPS).
- Smartphones, cellular phones, PDAs, iPods, MP3 players.

Benefits of Assistive Technology

- Assistive technology can help an individual with learning disabilities (LD) be more independent.– Using AT can provide more choices and greater freedom in daily life.
- AT provides tools to enable an individual to experience success at home, at school, at work and/or in the community.
- AT helps people of all ages.
- AT, successfully applied, can increase an individual's confidence and self-esteem.
- AT improves the quality of life, and removes barriers providing the tools for possible employment and educational opportunities.

Who can access Assistive Technology services?

Individuals registered with the disability services office at a post-secondary institution can access AT services. You will be assessed for AT requirements based on your academic area of study and your LD-related needs to determine a best fit. The AT specialist will talk about your learning challenges and strengths and will introduce and train you on adaptive technologies using your course material.

The AT specialist will determine the right AT solution for you by asking the following questions:

- Does the AT use any of your strengths?
- Does the AT work around some of your weaker areas?
- Is it easier to accomplish your task with the AT?
- Is it faster to accomplish your task with the AT?
- Is your task more understandable?

The key to effective assistive technology is finding the right match between the AT tool, the learning disability and the task. Finding the right tool is easy, addressing the problem(s) and making it work may not be as easy and may require a trial and error approach.

Individuals with learning disabilities will most often require AT that assists with reading, language, organizational skills and processing information.

Cost is often a factor, but your disability services office will be able to guide you in finding the appropriate funding sources and training.

3. Individuals' understanding of information given

3.1 Understand why it is important to check an individual's understanding of information given

Working with someone with a learning disability may challenge your idea of what communication is, and how you make yourself understood. It may make you think about your tone of voice and your body language as well as the words you use, and remind you that communication is not just about talking but also about listening.

This information is designed to provide a brief introduction to communication, and the problems faced by someone with a learning disability. It also contains tips on how you can be a better communicator, and how you can help someone with a learning disability to get their message across.

Use strategies to clarify and confirm understanding

- Be aware of turn-taking conventions and conventions related to interrupting
- Apply these conventions when confirming or querying understanding

- Use a range of fixed expressions to ask for clarification or repetition appropriate in formal and informal interactions

Try to imagine
- not being able to read this
- not being able to tell someone else about it
- not being able to find the words you wanted to say
- opening your mouth and no sound coming out
- words coming out jumbled up
- not getting the sounds right
- words getting stuck, someone jumping in, saying words for you
- people assuming what you want, without checking with you
- not hearing the questions
- not being able to see, or not being able to understand, the signs and symbols around you
- not understanding the words, phrases or expressions
- not being able to write down your ideas
- being unable to join a conversation)
- people ignoring what you are trying to say, feeling embarrassed and moving away
- people not waiting long enough for you to respond in some way, assuming you have nothing to say and moving away.

To be a successful communicator with people with a learning disability you need to be prepared to use all your communication tools.
- You need to follow the lead of the person you are communicating with.
- You need to go at their pace.

Making communication work
Whatever way you are trying to communicate with someone with a learning disability, there are some simple rules you can follow for good communication. It is important to always use accessible language, and to avoid jargon or long words that might be hard to understand. You should also take into account any physical disabilities the person may have that could make communication difficult for them.
- In person: many people with a learning disability have stated that the best way to communicate with them is face-to-face and one-to-one.
- In writing: it is a good idea to use bigger text and bullet points, and to keep writing at a minimum of 16 point. It is also important to remember that too much colour can make reading harder for some people.
- On the phone: the best way to talk to someone with a learning disability on the phone is slowly and clearly, using easily understandable words.

3.2 Know how to check the understanding of the individuals you support

Twelve Communication Points

1. Find a good place to communicate in. Somewhere quiet without distractions. If you are talking to a large group be aware that some people may find this difficult.
2. Ask open questions. Questions that don't have a simple yes or no answer.
3. Check with the person that you understand what they. are saying "The TV isn't working? Is that right?"
4. If the person wants to take you to show you something, go with them.
5. Watch the person. They may tell you things by their body language and facial expressions.
6. Learn from experience. You will need to be more observant and don't feel awkward about asking parents or carers for their help.
7. Try drawing. Even if your drawing is not great it might still be helpful. "I showed my manager my idea on a piece of paper, then I spoke to him about it. It showed really well what I meant, and that I'd made the effort to communicate."
8. Take your time, don't rush your communication.
9. Use gestures and facial expressions. If you are asking if someone is unhappy make your facial expression unhappy to reinforce what you are saying.
10. Be aware that some people find it easier to use real objects to communicate but photos and pictures can really help too.

Remember, all communication is meaningful, but you may need to work harder to understand. "I'm quite good on the phone as long as people tell me what they want and speak clearly and slowly. Then I can understand.

3.3 Know what to do if the individual is not able to understand the information

Accessible information

People with learning disabilities often have difficulties understanding information about health care and may require it to be provided in a range of accessible formats. Organisations need a policy or strategy regarding the provision of easy read information across the service, which includes methods of making accessible information easily available for staff to use, and a way of rectifying any gaps in information. Services should check that people with learning disabilities and family carers receive and use the information they need, and ensure the information is provided in a range of formats.

Working in Partnership with Families

People with learning disabilities can find accessing services difficult and stressful. Family carers are generally well placed to support their relative, and can be an excellent source of information about the individual.

It is important to plan with the person with learning disabilities and family maximise the chance of a good outcome. The family and carers are a valuable source of information about the individual and should be involved appropriately in decisions as long as the individual consents. Having a policy on the support available to family carers and the reasonable adjustments that need to be in place to take their needs into account is important, as is a protocol on the provision of support/care.

Consent, capacity and advocacy

Evidence on the implementation of the Mental Capacity Act is patchy, and yet it is crucial that workers understand and comply with the law regarding capacity, consent and best interest decision making.

Provider action

Policies on the Mental Capacity Act and Deprivation of Liberty should be readily available to workers, including information detailing when best interest assessments are required. Policies can be reinforced with training and an audit of treatment decisions can identify the need for further action. It is also helpful for the provider to have information on the use of Independent Mental Capacity Advocates and the Independent Complaints Advocacy Service by people with learning disabilities. People with learning disabilities and family carers should be aware of their rights under the Mental Capacity Act, and need accessible information about this.

Service delivery

People with learning disabilities often need reasonable adjustments made so that they can get the best out of their support. Record systems should identify people with a learning disability and any reasonable adjustments they require. Reasonable adjustments can include easy read appointment letters and reminder phone calls or texts, appointments at specific times and/or longer appointments and regular health checks. Providers can conduct an audit of appointments to ensure reasonable adjustments are being implemented. Workers can be encouraged to ask if the individual has a health action plan so that this can be updated appropriately.

Receiving a service

It can be more difficult to support people with learning disabilities and there are risks that signs and symptoms are ascribed to the person's learning disability rather than any other cause. Support can also be less effective if good planning regarding reasonable adjustments does not take place beforehand. It is important to guard against unspoken assumptions about the current and future quality of life of the individual when making decisions about the risks and benefits of support required.

4. Accessing information on behalf of individuals you support

4.1 Understand the legal and policy framework which allows someone to access personal information and make decisions on behalf of another adult

The Mental Capacity Act 2005 came into force during 2007. It affects people who are not able to make some or all of the decisions that affect their lives.

This could be now, or at any time in the future.
There are approximately two million people in England and Wales who lack mental capacity to make some decisions for themselves, for example people with:

- learning disabilities
- dementia
- mental health problems
- stroke and brain injuries

In addition to this there are up to six million family and unpaid carers and people involved in health and social care who may provide care, support or treatment for them. If you work with people who have a learning disability.

We want people with a learning disability to be aware of their choices and decisions, and talk to those around them about how they feel.

5 Principles of the Act

Five principles underpin the Mental Capacity Act 2005 and we have a legal obligation to ensure that every time we work with someone with a learning disability we work within the framework of these principles.

Principle 1: Assume a person has capacity unless proved otherwise. Previously, we have made many assumptions about people with a learning disability. We may have assumed that because they have a learning disability they do not have the capacity to make their own decisions.
Under the Mental Capacity Act 2005 we have a duty to assume that a person with a learning disability has the capacity to make their own decisions. The process of assessment will confirm this or show that the individual may not be able to make decisions on their own.
Principle 2: Do not treat people as incapable of making a decision unless all practicable steps have been tried to help them. It has been common practice to give information to the person with a learning disability and assume that they lack capacity if they cannot make a decision immediately. Often this has not been the case at all. We now have a duty to ensure that we take every practicable step to support the individual to make their own decisions.
This includes:

- presenting information in an accessible format and helping the individual to communicate their decision to you, for example using symbols, pictures, signs, assistive technology, clear jargon-free text or a translator if the person does not speak English spending time identifying the preferred communication methods and, if this information is not known, finding out from those who know the individual well allowing time for the person to process the information or being aware that certain times of the day might be better than others because an individual may need time to reflect on the information and we cannot assume that a decision and choices can be made in a single session – they may need to discuss with those around the ensuring the environment is comfortable, private and does not have any distractions
- using calendars and diaries or objects of reference

4.2 Understand the issues of confidentiality and data protection in relation to accessing information on behalf of someone else

CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY

All information regarding clients or other parties must be recorded in the appropriate place, i.e. Care Notes, Staff Files, Diary, Computer Files. No information should be left unattended or in a place where others can view the information. Any Computer Files should be consistent with the Data Protection Act.

All records must be current, accurate, legible and appropriate at the time of writing or recording.

Only those who have a right to access information should be able to view it. Any unauthorised viewing is contrary to policy and a disciplinary offence. Any outside agency or internal employee must identify who they are and the reasons for their interest in the information

Any statement, verbal, written, sign language must be consistent with the need of that information and information should not be given outside of that need. All staff should be aware of the need for confidentiality and be sensitive to whom and why the information is given

Where information is given which is relevant outside of inter-personal communication, the individual giving the information to the other person must be made aware of the fact that the information will be given to any appropriate individual or organisation.

All records that carry confidential information should be stored securely and where appropriate, locked in a room or cupboard which has access only to those whom have authority to hold a key or enter that area.

- **The Data Protection Act**

    The Data Protection Act 1998 regulates the processing of personal information by data controllers.

Personal information for the purposes of the Act is data about living people who can be identified from that information, covering data such as customer and staff records. The Act applies to information you hold on a computer as well as to some paper-based records. It also applies to some CCTV systems.

The eight principles

The Data Protection Act 1998 sets out eight rules that data controllers must follow for protecting personal information – these are known as the eight principles.

Personal data must be:

• processed fairly and lawfully
• processed only for one or more specified and lawful purpose
• adequate, relevant and not excessive for those purposes
• accurate and kept up to date – data subjects have the right to have inaccurate personal data corrected or destroyed if the personal information is inaccurate to any matter of fact
• kept for no longer than is necessary for the purposes it is being processed
• processed in line with the rights of individuals – this includes the right to be informed of all the information held about them, to prevent processing of their personal information for marketing purposes, and to compensation if they can prove they have been damaged by a data controller's non-compliance with the Act
• secured against accidental loss, destruction or damage and against unauthorised or unlawful processing – this applies to you even if your business uses a third party to process personal information on your behalf
• not transferred to countries outside the European Economic Area – the EU plus Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein – that do not have adequate protection for individual's personal information, unless a condition from Schedule four of the Act can be met

If a data controller's processing of personal information does not comply with the principles, the Information Commissioner can take enforcement action against that data control, unless a condition

If a data controller's processing of personal information does not comply with the principles, the Information Commissioner can take enforcement action against that data control

4.3 Understand what needs to be done before accessing information on behalf of another individual

Yes possibly, someone with a Learning disability but with capacitywill need to provide with written authority for someone else to access your information on your behalf. You can either complete a consent to disclose letter or provide signed written authority that includes your:

- status
- full name;
- address
- contact telephone number

You must also provide the following details regarding the person who will be accessing your information:

- the persons full name;

- the persons relationship to you;

- the type of information or access you wish the third party to have; and

- when you expect them to collect this information and in what format (letter/verbal/email etc).

Please note the person you have authorised must show photo identification (passport/driving licence) when accessing any information.

Relatives, carers or friends of adults who do not have capacity to make a request on their own behalf or to give their consent are not automatically entitled to access that adult's personal information. The professionals involved may share certain, relevant information with appropriate people if the Local Authority considers it is necessary to do so and is in the best interests of the adult concerned. If you have been appointed to act on behalf of an adult who lacks mental capacity, either by an Enduring or Lasting Power of Attorney, or by a Court Order, you may be able to access information relevant to that Power or Order on that adult's behalf. You can apply for the right to deal with the benefits of someone who can't manage their own affairs because they're mentally incapable or severely disabled.

Only one appointee can act on behalf of someone who is entitled to benefits (the claimant) from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

An appointee can be:

- an individual, eg a friend or relative
- an organisation or representative of an organisation, eg a solicitor or local council

Information that you are not allowed to see

The Data Protection Act 1998 identifies certain information that we are not obliged to release to you. This may include:

- information that could cause physical or mental harm to you or someone else.
- information that has been supplied to us in confidence by someone else and they are not willing to let you see it.
- information that is personal to someone else who has not given their consent for you to see it.
- information that relates to prevention or detection of crime.

5. Impact of information about services and facilities on the individuals you support

5.1 Know ways to help an individual understand the meaning and impact of information they have accessed

Our definition of a learning disability is "a significantly reduced ability to understand new or complex information, to learn new skills (impaired intelligence), with a reduced ability to cope independently (impaired social functioning), which started at or around the time of birth, with a lasting effect on development".

In communication, clarification involves offering back to the speaker the essential meaning, as understood by the listener, of what they have just said. Thereby checking that the listener's understanding is correct and resolving any areas of confusion or misunderstanding. Clarification is important in many situations especially when what is being communicated is difficult in some way. Communication can be 'difficult' for many reasons, perhaps sensitive emotions are being discussed - or you are listening to some complex information or following instructions.

As an extension of <u>reflecting</u>, clarifying reassures the speaker that the listener is attempting to understand the messages they are expressing.

Clarifying can involve asking questions or occasionally summarising what the speaker has said. A listener can ask for clarification when they cannot make sense of the speaker's responses. Sometimes, the messages that a speaker is attempting to send can be highly complex, involving many different people, issues, places and/or times. Clarifying helps you to sort these out and also to check the speaker's priorities.
Through clarification it is possible for the speaker and the listener to make sense of these often confused and complex issues. Clarifying involves genuineness on the listener's part and it shows speakers that the listener is interested in them and in what they have to say.

Some examples of non-directive clarification-seeking questions are:
"I'm not quite sure I understand what you are saying."
"I don't feel clear about the main issue here."
"When you said .... what did you mean?"
"Could you repeat ...?"

Clarifying involves:

Non-judgemental questioning.
Summarising and seeking feedback as to its accuracy.

Clarification Questions

When you are the listener in a sensitive environment, the right sort of non-directive questioning can enable the speaker to describe their viewpoint more fully.

Asking the right question at the right time can be crucial and comes with practice. The best questions are open-ended as they give the speaker choice in how to respond, whereas closed questions allow only very limited responses.

Open Questions

If your role is to assist a speaker to talk about an issue, often the most effective questioning starts with 'when', 'where', 'how' or 'why'. These questions encourage speakers to be open and expand on their thoughts. For example:
"When did you first start feeling like this?"
"Why do you feel this way?"

Closed Questions

Closed questions usually elicit a 'yes' or 'no' response and do not encourage speakers to be open and expand on their thoughts. Such questions often begin with 'did you?' or 'were you?' For example:
"Did you always feel like this?"

Guidelines for Clarifying

Clarification is the skill we use to ensure that we have understood the message of the speaker in an interpersonal exchange. When using clarification follow these guidelines to help aid communication and understanding.

Admit if you are unsure about what the speaker means.
Ask for repetition.
State what the speaker has said as you understand it, and check whether this is what they really said.
Ask for specific examples.
Use open, non-directive questions – if appropriate.
Ask if you have got it right and be prepared to be corrected.

Summarising

As a further extension to clarification a summary involves reviewing what has taken place during the whole conversation.

It is important to keep only to the essential components of the conversation, and it must be given from the speaker's frame of reference, not an interpretation from the listener's viewpoint. The aim of a summary is to review understanding, not to give explanation, to judge, to interpret or provide solutions.

Summarising should be done at the end of a conversation, although sometimes it may be appropriate midway through as a way of drawing together different threads. At the start of a conversation, it is useful to summarise any previous discussions or meetings as it can help to provide focus. Whilst the summary is likely to be the longest time a listener will be speaking during a conversation, it is important to be as concise and straightforward as possible.

Summary of Clarification

In reflecting, clarifying and summarising, speakers must be allowed to disagree with, and correct, what the listener says. They should be encouraged to express themselves again, if necessary, giving the listener another chance at understanding, and to check understanding until agreement is reached.

Reflecting, clarifying and summarising are the tools used by active listeners to enable them to demonstrate understanding and encourage a speaker to talk openly.
For effective communication it is essential that the listener and speaker both have the same understanding of the discussion. The speaker must, therefore, have the opportunity to correct the listener's understanding.

Use clarification, reflection and summarising to help with interpersonal relationships

5.2 Understand why information received may be unwelcome or distressing to an individual

Receiving bad news to someone is never a pleasant event especially if it is at the wrong time or in the wrong way can be even worse, so it's important to know the best approaches to breaking bad news. The real difficulty (besides the content of the bad news) is that it is just as hard for the person breaking the bad news as it is for the person receiving it.

Whether you're a professional delivering news about a patient's illness, financial fortunes, or legal woes, or you're a friend, family member, or neighbour having to tell someone you know well something bad, this article will provide some methods to help you do this with the least amount of aggravation for both parties.

Work through your own reaction to the news before preparing yourself to tell someone else. The news may impact you equally badly, or it may disturb you considerably even if it doesn't impact you directly. It is important for you to be able to have given yourself a chance to recover your feelings before you try to explain things to someone else. Perhaps have a cup of coffee, take a shower, meditate or do deep breathing for a few minutes, or simply sit in a quiet dark place for some moments to give yourself the chance to pull together. Once you've moved past the initial shock, it'll be less intimidating to tell the other person but it's important to acknowledge that it'll still be hard, so don't feel that you have to be "perfectly resolved" before talking to them; if the bad news also affects you, that is unrealistic to even attempt.

Determine if you're the right person to break the news. If you're a casual acquaintance who has just happened to learn early about some breaking bad news, possibly you should *not* be the bearer of that news. It's insensitive to blast personal or sensitive information all over social media, for example, just because you know something. If the news relates to a death or other serious circumstance, give the family and close friends time to call or visit people personally before you jump in.

Practice what you're going to say. This can help you to formulate the words you'd like to use, but be prepared to remain flexible and ready to adapt to the other person's cues (see below).

Ensure that the physical setting is comfortable and private. The worst thing that you can do is to blurt something out in a public space with nowhere for the recipient to turn or even sit down to cope with the aftermath of hearing it. Choose an area that has somewhere to sit or rest and that has a low likelihood of being intruded upon by other people. Other things to do to improve the environment include:

- Turn off all electronic distractions such as the TV, radio, music, etc.
- Pull the blind or curtains if this will improve privacy but don't shut out too much light if it's daytime.
- Shut the door or pull across a screen or other item to create a private space for the two of you.
- If you think it would be helpful, have a family member or friend also accompany you.

Choose the right time if possible. Sometimes waiting isn't possible because the news has to be delivered immediately, before rumours or ill-will gets involved. However, if it is possible, delay the bad news until a time when the other person is available and receptive. In other words, delivering bad news as a person is coming in the door from a day of work or school, or after you've just had a huge row with your partner is not likely to be the best of times. While there is not "good" time to tell bad news, there is a point to waiting until a person is not in the middle of arriving or similar.

- If the news is of such import and urgency that it can't wait for a "better time," just take a deep breath and break in to whatever is going on with something like, "I need to speak with you, Jane, and I'm afraid it can't wait."
- The sense of urgency can also be imparted over the phone, but it is helpful to ask if it's possible to meet up quickly so that you can share the news face-to-face. If this isn't possible, or if the person really needs to know *now* though, you're best asking the recipient if they're

sitting down as you need to tell them something unpleasant. If you're worried about how they might cope alone, also suggest that they have someone else in the vicinity for support.

Assess how the recipient of the news is feeling *before* your delivery of the news. Obviously, they'll already be alerted that something is up by your request to speak in private and the arranging of the private space. It is also important to find out what the person already knows, in order to avoid repeating things or prolonging an already difficult situation. This step is important because it will help you to tailor the words and approach you'll use to initiate the telling of the bad news. Things to look for include whether the other person already seems to have an inkling that something bad is up, the presence of fear, anxiety, or worry, and whether or not this news is going to come from "out of the blue" (like a death in a car accident) or is something inevitable although not yet faced (like failure of a cancer treatment).

- Consider what the bad news is. How bad is it? Are you trying to tell someone that their cat died, or that you lost your job? Has a family member or close friend died? If the bad news relates to you (such as you losing your job) the effects will be different than if the problem relates to them (such as their cat dying).

Approach the delivery of the bad news. The words and your style of delivery are dependent on who you are, your relationship to the person you're breaking it to, and the context of the news. Use cues obtained from the previous step to tailor your delivery method but there are some key things to bear in mind when delivering bad news:

- *Transition*: Help the person get ready for unexpected bad news with such phrases as: "I have some sad news to tell you", "I've just received a call from the hospital: there has been an accident and...": or "I've been talking to your specialist and...", "There is no easy way to say this but..." etc.[1]
- *Narrative*: Be gentle, but come to the point – this is easier on the person receiving bad news than beating around the bush. Don't ramble or make small talk. Provide the story of what has happened (the narrative) to explain the events. Look the person(s) straight in the eye and calmly tell them what has happened. If there has been an accident and someone has died, say so directly, but gently: "I'm so sorry to tell you this; Michael was in a terrible car accident." Give the person a little time to emotionally prepare for what you might tell them, and after they take a breath to collect themself, they'll say, "What happened?" or "How is he?" Then follow up directly with, "I'm so sorry, but he was killed."
- As you narrate the events, react to the emotions of the other person as they arise by acknowledging and addressing them.
- Avoid using euphemisms or metaphors when delivering bad news.

Focus on good communications and an empathic response. Even if you don't gauge the other person's initial feelings correctly, and you bungle the delivery of the news, the most important part of breaking news is how well you respond to the other person's emotions.

- Identify the emotion(s) – these could include shock, fear, anger, disbelief, sadness, distress, or a combination of any of these and other emotions;
- Identify the cause of the emotions – usually this will be the bad news itself, but it could be more layered than this, so be mindful
- Make the connection between the identification of the emotions and the cause, and make it clear to the recipient that you get the connection. Do this by acknowledging their response, such as "This is a clearly a terrible shock" or "I can see that you're really upset and angry about what has happened", and so forth. Doing this lets the person know you get their pain or other reaction and that you've tied it to the news you've just relayed, without passing any judgment, making any assumptions, or trying to minimize their emotions.
- If they respond with great anger and yell or behave angrily, remain calm but don't place yourself in a position of being harmed. If they cry, be there to comfort them. If they become violent, seek help immediately.
- Realize that the recipient may remain silent, letting the news sink in. If they do that, place your arm around their shoulders and simply sit with them in a display of sympathetic solidarity.
- When comforting the person, keep in mind social and cultural conventions to avoid making the situation worse.

Decide what to do next. It's all very well delivering bad news but there must be a strategy for after delivery of it. Action can help prevent a person from going into a state of paralysis and shock, and can give them a sense of being involved or doing something to resolve, manage, deal with, or face the results of the bad news. Help to decide how to handle the news. If a person has died, how will the friend or relative cope? If a cat died, how will the owner honour it? If someone lost their job, how will they find a new one?

- Perhaps you can offer to take the recipient somewhere, such as visiting a hospital, gathering belongings, seeing a counsellor, going to the police, or whatever is needed where your support could be useful.
- Make it plain what is likely to happen next, especially with relation to your own involvement. If you're a doctor delivering bad news about treatment for example, you might outline the next steps for the patient continuing to visit you. Simply letting the person know when you'll be around or back again to check on them can be a help in and of itself.

- Whatever promises you make to assist the person who has received bad news, be sure to follow through on what you've said you'll do.'
- Give the person your time where possible, and be accepting of their need to grieve where relevant.

5.3 Understand how to provide or access support for an individual who is distressed because of information they have accessed

Principles

- Identify common **causes** of distress
- Be aware of signs that may indicate an **individual** is distressed
- Know how distress may affect the way an individual communicates
- Matters affecting how working with an individual who is distressed may impact on own well being
- Access information and advice about supporting an individual through a time of distress
- Establish signs of distress that would indicate the need for specialist intervention
- Understand how to access specialist intervention
- Identify sources of support to manage own feelings when working with an individual who is distressed
- Communicate empathy and reassurance in ways that respect the individual's dignity, culture and beliefs
- Demonstrate ways to alleviate immediate distress
- Adapt support in response to the individual's reactions
- Demonstrate how to involve others in supporting an individual who is distressed
- Encourage the individual to express thoughts and feelings about troubling aspects of their life
- Work with the individual and **others** to identify triggers for distress
- Work with an individual and others to reduce triggers or alleviate causes of distress
- Encourage the individual to review their usual ways of coping with distress
- Maintain records relating to the individual's distress and the support provided

Report on periods of distress in line with agreed ways of working

Causes of distress may be:

Internal to the individual
- Related to support needs
- Related to support provision
- Related to loss
- Related to change

Individual : An individual is someone requiring care or support

Others may include:

- Family
- Friends
- Advocates
- Line manager
- Other professionals
- Others who are important to the individual's well-being

6. Giving feedback on information provided

6.1 Understand how to check that information is up to date and accurate

> When you know something, say what you know. When you don't know something, say that you don't know. That is knowledge. — Kung Fu Tzu (Confucius)

The purpose of feedback is to alter messages so the intention of the original communicator is understood by the second communicator. It includes verbal and nonverbal responses to another person's message.

Providing feedback is accomplished by paraphrasing the words of the sender. Restate the sender's feelings or ideas in your own words, rather than repeating their words. Your words should be saying, "This is what I understand your feelings to be, am I correct?" It not only includes verbal responses, but also nonverbal ones. Nodding your head or squeezing their hand to show agreement, dipping your eyebrows shows you don't quite understand the meaning of their last phrase, or sucking air in deeply and blowing it hard shows that you are also exasperated with the situation.

Carl Rogers listed five main categories of feedback. They are listed in the order in which they occur most frequently in daily conversations. Notice that we make judgments more often than we try to understand:

- **Evaluative:** Making a judgment about the worth, goodness, or appropriateness of the other person's statement.
- **Interpretive:** Paraphrasing — attempting to explain what the other person's statement means.
- **Supportive:** Attempting to assist or bolster the other communicator.
- **Probing:** Attempting to gain additional information, continue the discussion, or clarify a point.
- **Understanding:** Attempting to discover completely what the other communicator means by her statements.

Imagine how much better daily communications would be if listeners tried to understand first, before they tried to evaluate what someone is saying.

What does the Data Protection Act say about accuracy and updating?

The Act says that:

Personal data shall be accurate and, where necessary, kept up to date.

This is the fourth data protection principle. Although this principle sounds straightforward, the law recognises that it may not be practical to double-check the accuracy of every item of personal data you receive. So the Act makes special provision about the accuracy of information that individuals provide about themselves, or that is obtained from third parties.

To comply with these provisions you should:

- take reasonable steps to ensure the accuracy of any personal data you obtain;
- ensure that the source of any personal data is clear;
- carefully consider any challenges to the accuracy of information; and
- consider whether it is necessary to update the information.

The Data Protection Act does not define the word "accurate", but it does say that personal data is inaccurate if it is incorrect or misleading as to any matter of fact. It will usually be obvious whether information is accurate or not. For example, if an individual has moved house from Chester to Wilmslow, a record showing that he currently lives in Chester is obviously inaccurate. But a record showing that he once lived in Chester remains accurate, even though he no longer lives there. You must always be clear about what a record is intended to show.

There is often confusion about whether it is appropriate to keep records of things that happened which should not have happened. Individuals understandably don't want their records to be tarnished by, for example, a penalty or other charge that was later cancelled or refunded. However, the organisation may legitimately wish its records to accurately reflect what actually happened – in this example, that a charge was imposed, and later cancelled or refunded. Keeping a record of a mistake and its correction might also be in the individual's interests.

It is acceptable to keep records of events that happened in error, provided those records are not misleading about the facts. You may need to add a note to a record to clarify that a mistake happened.

Does personal data always have to be up to date

This depends on what the information is used for. If the information is used for a purpose that relies on it remaining current, it should be kept up to date. For example, your employee payroll records should be updated when there is a pay rise. Similarly, records should be updated for customers' changes of address so that goods are delivered to the correct location.

In other circumstances, it will be equally obvious when information does not need to be updated.

Also, where information is held only for statistical, historical or other research reasons, updating the information might even defeat the purpose of holding it.

6.2 Understand how to enable and empower individuals to raise questions or concerns about information

Personal empowerment is about looking at who you are and becoming more aware of yourself as a unique individual.

Personal empowerment involves developing the confidence and strength to set realistic goals and fulfil your potential. Everyone has strengths and weaknesses and a range of skills that are used in everyday situations, but all too often people remain unaware of, or undervalue, their true abilities.

A person aiming for empowerment is able to take control of their life by making positive choices and setting goals. Developing self-awareness, an understanding of your strengths and weaknesses – knowing your own limitations is key to personal empowerment.

Taking steps to set and achieve goals – both short and longer-term and developing new skills, acts to increase confidence which, in itself, is essential to self-empowerment.

What is Personal Empowerment?

At a basic level, the term '*empowerment*' simply means '*becoming powerful*'. Building personal empowerment involves reflecting on our personal values, skills and goals and being prepared to adjust our behaviour in order to achieve our goals. Personal empowerment also means being aware that other people have their own set of values and goals which may different to ours.

Many other, more detailed, definitions exist. These usually centre on the idea that personal empowerment gives an individual the ability to:

- Take control of their circumstances and achieve their own goals in their personal and working life.
- Become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses and therefore be better equipped to deal with problems and achieve goals.
- Enhance the contribution they make both as an individual and as a member of a team.
- Take opportunities to enhance personal growth and a sense of fulfilment.

Developing personal empowerment usually involves making some fundamental changes in life, which is not always an easy process. The degree of change required will differ from person to person, depending on the individual starting point.

Dimensions of Personal Empowerment

The following '*dimensions of personal empowerment*' are based on the belief that the greater the range of coping responses an individual develops, the greater their chance of coping effectively with diverse life situations. These dimensions are:

Self-Awareness

Self-awareness involves understanding our individual character and how we are likely to respond to situations. This enables us to build on our positive qualities and be aware of any negative traits which may reduce our effectiveness. Self-aware people make conscious decisions to enhance their lives whenever possible, learning from past experiences.

Values

Values are opinions or beliefs that are important to us but of which we are not always aware. They can be any kind of belief or perceived obligation, anything we prefer and for any reason. The reasons we may prefer one thing over another, or choose one course of action over another, may not always be obvious or known; there may be no apparent reason for our values. Nevertheless our values are important to us as individuals. In order to be self-aware it is necessary to be aware of our values, to critically examine them and to accept that our values may be different from those of others.

Skills

An individual's skills are the main resource which enables them to achieve their desired goals. Skills can be gained through experience, practice, education and training. It is only by developing such skills that individual values can be translated into action.

Information

Knowledge or information is necessary in the development of self-awareness and skills. It is an essential skill in itself to know where to find appropriate information. Without information, the choices open to people are limited, both in their personal and working lives. The internet has provided an easy way for everybody to access huge amounts of information very quickly and easily. The problem is then centred around the quality of the information found, and the skill set is concerned with finding accurate and reliable information.

Goals

Setting goals is a means by which an individual can take charge of his/her life. The process of setting a goal involves people thinking about their values and the direction that they would like their lives to follow. Choices are made through reflection followed by action. Goals should always be both specific and realistic. Setting personal goals gives us a sense of direction in life, this direction is essential to personal empowerment.

Language and Empowerment

Language is the main medium of human communication whether used in spoken or written form.

The use of language, how individuals express themselves verbally and non-verbally to others, can be empowering to both themselves and the people with whom they are communicating. Looking at how language is used is important in terms of self-empowerment and when attempting to empower other people.

The Use of Language for Personal Empowerment

In terms of personal empowerment and communication the following ideas are helpful and their use can be both self-affirming and positive:

- **Use Positive Language:** Research into language suggests that a person's self-image is reflected in the words that they use. For example, people who say they '*should*' behave in a certain way implies passivity and can detract from them seeming to be in control and taking responsibility for their actions. Talking about yourself in a positive way, acknowledging strengths and weaknesses, can be empowering.
- **Use Active Language:** Use terms which imply positive action rather than making vague statements, particularly when talking about the future. For example, 'I will...' and 'I can...'.
- **Use Words to Define Your Own Space and Identity:** If you fail to use words to define your own space and identity then others will tend to define you and set standards by which you evaluate yourself. Furthermore, they will try to persuade you to conform to their demands. Be clear about who you are and what your values and goals are – do not let others define you.

The Use of Language for Empowering Others

In order to use language to help empower others:

- **Do not use jargon or complex terminology:** The use of jargon and complex terminology can be both alienating and dis-empowering. When working with clients the use of jargon can create feelings of intimidation and inferiority. Without shared understanding of the words you use, effective and empowering communication cannot take place. Choose words with care, which give clarity to what you are trying to express.
- **Focus on the words people use:** Mirror words people use, see our pages: <u>Reflection</u> and <u>Clarification</u> for more information. Using shared terminology appropriately can enable you appear more 'in tune' with the other person and what they are saying.
- **Choose positive words:** Choosing positive or active words such as '*will*' or '*can*' indicates that you have control in your life and is more likely to induce positive action in others. Compare

the use of these words with others such as '*might*' or '*maybe*' which suggest hesitancy. Using words and statements which carry responsibility are empowering as they suggest a determined rather than a passive approach.

- **Avoid criticism and negativity:** Criticism should always be given with extreme care and only when absolutely necessary. Once words have been spoken they cannot be easily taken back. If criticism is necessary then it can be given in a constructive way, through the use of positive and supporting words and phrases. Always attempt to cushion criticism with positive observations.
- **Use open questions when appropriate:** The use of closed questions will restrict responses to 'yes' and 'no' answers. This type of question can leave people feeling powerless because there is no opportunity to explain their response. On the other hand, open questions give the person being asked the chance to explore the reasons behind their answers. Open questions encourage a person to take responsibility for their thoughts and actions and can therefore aid empowerment. Open questions can also help people to solve problems through their own devices, help them to set their own goals and work out an appropriate plan of action. See our pages: <u>Questioning</u> and <u>Question Types</u> for more information.

Developing Self-Empowerment

We all have opportunities to explore and develop new skills. In order to become more empowered we should, in our interactions with others, aim to:

- Develop trust.
- Understand our strengths, weaknesses and limits.
- Develop confidence and self-esteem.

Developing Trust

Developing trust can be a difficult and lengthy process. In order to develop trust with others you should aim to:

- **Be Open:** In the sharing of information, ideas and thoughts. When appropriate also sharing emotions, feelings and reactions. Also aim to reciprocate appropriately, when somebody shares their emotions, thoughts or feelings with you.
- **Share and Co-operate:** Share resources and knowledge with others to help them to achieve their goals. Work together towards mutual goals.
- **Be Trustworthy:** When other people place their trust in you do your best to provide positive outcomes.
- **Be Accepting:** Hold the values and views of others in high regard.
- **Be Supportive:** Support others when necessary but also recognise their strengths – allowing them to work towards goals without your intervention as appropriate.
- **In the workplace and in any professional working relationship there are three basic components of trust:**

- Trust in the integrity and goodwill between all workers, regardless of salary or status and whether paid or unpaid.
- Trust that all workers within an organisation share the same objectives and are open with each other about any conflicting objectives.
- Trust in each other's competence and to do what you promise to undertake.
- Trust can be broken very quickly and may never be restored to its former level, think about the points above and try to build and maintain trusting relationships in both your personal and professional life.

- Avoid the following actions that may destroy trust and have a detrimental effect on personal empowerment:

- Making a joke at another's expense.
- Being judgemental about another's behaviour, attitudes or beliefs.
- Communicating rejection or non-acceptance, either verbally or non-verbally.

Understanding Your Strengths, Weaknesses and Limits

Becoming empowered includes knowing your own strengths and weaknesses, identifying these will enable you to work on improving your weaknesses and build on your strengths.

It is not uncommon for other people to have misjudged your strengths and weaknesses, or for you to misjudge those of others. This can lead to opportunities being limited due to the misconception of abilities. It is important, therefore, to know your own strengths and weaknesses and to communicate them clearly to others, whilst encouraging others to communicate their strengths and weaknesses to you.

In some circumstances you may feel that you face problems that are truly beyond your capabilities. In such cases you should seek help. Empowered people know their own limits and have no problems with asking for help or guidance. Self-knowledge, often referred to as self-awareness, is a strength which enables you to set personal improvement goals in order to make a more substantial contribution. The more empowered you become, the more you will be able to help others to become empowered.

Developing Confidence

Confidence acts as one of the greatest motivators or most powerful limitations to anyone trying to change their behaviour and become more empowered. Most people only undertake tasks that they feel capable of doing and it takes great effort to overcome a lack of confidence in one's capabilities. Self-empowerment involves people constantly challenging their own beliefs and what they are capable of undertaking.

Personal empowerment is not a static thing that you can do once in your life, you should view personal empowerment as ongoing personal development. As circumstances change and develop and as we ourselves change and develop so do our needs for development and empowerment.

7. Challenging information that discriminates

7.1 Understand what makes information discriminatory in relation to the individuals you support

Within your role you will at times be required to challenge others over their behaviour because you feel it is potentially discriminatory.

You are required to challenge in order to:

- ensure you create an environment that is free of discrimination and that values difference
- reinforce the policies and procedures of your organisation
- ensure you do not breach the equalities legal framework.

Knowing what to challenge, and when to challenge, can be tricky and open to personal interpretation. There are some non-negotiable re inappropriate language/behaviour e.g. swearing, language that is racist/sexist/homophobic, etc. We can often find debate over questions such as 'what constitutes inappropriate banter?' or 'They meant no offence by a comment – do I still need to challenge?'

However, not challenging is not a neutral act – it can be seen as colluding behaviour.

Guiding principles re challenging
If in doubt about whether you should challenge someone's behaviour or not, consider the following.

- Is the banter/joke/comment excluding anyone or aimed at anyone in order to ridicule them?
- Could someone be offended by the behaviour?
- Lack of intention is not an excuse for behaviour. You are required to consider and manage the effect of behaviour.
- Is the banter/joke/behaviour open to misinterpretation or misunderstanding?
- How to challenge

There is no definite way to challenge inappropriate behaviour and no doubt you will find your own approach to challenging effectively. The following may be useful to consider.

- Don't punish or blame – say what is better.
- Understand your audience. Think about your role in the situation – worker, colleague, manager – and consider this in your approach.
- State your position: 'That's disrespectful; we don't talk about individuals like that.'
- Understand the situation. Do you challenge there and then, or quietly at a later date? What will be most effective for the person involved/for those witnessing the incident?

Case studies

Sometimes you need to respond to remarks and situations that might be discriminatory. The next exercise gives you an opportunity to practise some skills and strategies and consider good practice in these situations.

What issues are raised by the following situations?

1. You observe a colleague talking to an individual with learning disabilities. The individual has a speech impairment which means that his speech is slow. The trainee continually interrupts him and finishes his sentences for him.

2. A worker has raised with you that they do not feel confident when discussing disability issues with individual as they are not sure they are using the latest 'pc' language and terminology relating to this group. They are worried they may be open to challenge and not have the knowledge or confidence to respond. You recognise that this could be an issue for others in your group.

3. You have noticed that a worker tends to make a number of assumptions when referring to the individuals' social identity. For example she often says things like 'Asian people do this' or 'gay men are known for doing that'. You are worried it may demonstrate underlying issues.

4. A tutorial has just begun and a worker makes a joke about Polish people being everywhere. The group laughs awkwardly and no one challenges.

5. The standard work produced by a worker has recently shown a marked decline. When you talk to the worker about this she says that she is experiencing racist behaviour from another learner at the home and is finding this impossible to cope with.

Issues/principles
- We should ensure we treat all people in a respectful way. Learners' behaviour may make individuals feel patronised.
- Consider what the impact of workers' behaviour is on the individual.
- Consider when it might be the best time to intervene.
- The intention of workers may be positive, i.e. wants to help. Your role is to manage the effect of behaviour on individuals.

Is this just an individual need or a wider learning issue?
- Language does change, evolve. We should try to keep up to date but recognise this may not always be possible.
- Occasionally we will all get language 'wrong'. The important thing is that we learn from this and get language 'right' next time.
- You might want to discuss this with workers in a training session.

- Organisations may be reluctant to produce definitive guidance on language as it does change. A document from the Equality and Human Rights Commission may provide a thoughtful introduction to language and its power.
- What are the underlying reasons for the learner's assumptions? Is it lack of knowledge and understanding or underlying prejudice? Your approach may vary depending on your judgement on this.
- There is a need to be clear with workers about our expectations of them and their behaviour is.
- Consider when might be the best time to intervene. A comment, in the moment, makes a clear statement to all present what behaviour is acceptable/not acceptable.
- Doing nothing could be seen as condoning behaviour.
- Talking to workers after meeting may be less embarrassing for them and allow more conversation around what is acceptable or not. It does not send out a message to all people present.
- As a key worker you are responsible for setting the right tone. You need to consider when/how you challenge.
- Your role is not to make a judgement about whether racism may or may not be taking place. Your role is to:
  o listen to the learner
  o name the problem: 'So you feel you are being treated in a racist manner?'
  o explore how the learner wants to resolve the situation. Provide clear options to them
  o take any supportive action that may be required and monitor the situation carefully
  o be aware that this situation could result in a formal harassment and discrimination investigation.

7.2 Be aware of the legislation designed to prevent discriminatory information

Discrimination

The Equality Act 2010 harmonised and consolidated earlier discrimination laws so that all types of discrimination now come under the one Act.

The Equality Act 2010 prohibits less favourable treatment on certain grounds known as 'protected characteristics'.

Protected Characteristics

- Age
- Disability
- Gender Reassignment
- Marriage and partnership

- Pregnancy and Maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex or sexual orientation

You're protected from discrimination in these situations:

- at work
- in education
- as a consumer
- when using public services
- when buying or renting property
- as a member or guest of a private club or association

- You are legally protected from discrimination by the Equality Act 2010.

- You're also protected from discrimination if:

- you're associated with someone who has a protected characteristic, eg a family member or friend
- you've complained about discrimination or supported someone else's claim

Action against discrimination

You can do something voluntarily to help people with a protected characteristic. This is called 'positive action'.

Taking positive action is legal if people with a protected characteristic:

- are at a disadvantage
- have particular needs
- are under-represented in an activity or type of work

7.3 Understand why it is important to challenge any information that discriminates against the individuals you support

Principles and Values
· To be respected
· To be treated as an individual
· To be treated in a dignified way
· To be treated equally and not discriminated against
· To be aloud privacy
· To be cared for in a way that meets our needs and takes account of preferences and choices
· To be safeguarded and protected from danger and harm
· To be allowed access of information about themselves

- To be cared for in a way that meets the client's needs
- Given choices and promote independence

To be treated as an individual

We are all individuals and everyone has their own unique character and personality, which are developed through the different life experiences, cultures and beliefs we follow. It is also through other factors such as social class, age, ethnicity, culture, background and gender. It is important and essential to treat different people as individuals and to try and meet their needs rather than stereotyping people. E.g. all black people are the same. Treating everyone the same 'regardless' is failing to respect diversity.

To be treated in a dignified way

We all want to be treated with dignity and it is a very important part of an individual's life. Working in the health and social care profession it is important to help people maintain their dignity so they can keep their sense of self-respect and self-worth. All health and social care professionals should be sensitive and aware of the needs of people and service users especially during times when the body and its functions could be exposed.

The most effective way for a service provider to challenge discriminatory practice in adult social care settings is to be educated about the regulations that govern the care, be aware and report situations that are discriminatory to your team leader or group manager. There is not a specific step by step process where you fill out a piece of paper and the discrimination evaporates. What is important to remember is that the model for adults social care is based on the needs of the individual matched with the services that will most closely meet those needs. The care is patient centred, but team driven. Education is probably the best weapon to have in cases of discrimination in addition to sharing information with the team to find a solution to the problem causing discrimination.

Listed below are either ideas that a care provider needs to understand and actions that can be taken to minimise the likelihood of discriminatory action. In addition, follow the job description for your area of service and communicate any concerns in a positive, resolution-oriented manner to your team.

1. define 'positive ageing' and the contribution that older people make to society;
2. discuss ageism, and the stereotypes and labels that are associated with ageing and old age;
3. demonstrate an understanding of the importance of dignity and respect for many older patients;
4. recognise the possible signs of abuse or neglect, so that concerns can be raised to ensure the safety and empowerment of vulnerable adults;
5. identify best practice and opportunities to achieve person-centred care in both community and hospital settings;
6. reflect on your own practice and the standards of care provided within your practice setting,

and establish actions that you can take to ensure that patients are treated with dignity and respect, and receive care that is person centred.

7.4 Understand how to challenge such information and who may need to be involved in the process

Knowing what to do when you come across someone acting in a manner which you consider to be discriminatory is always going to be a difficult issue. A lot will depend on the nature of the relationship you have with the individual, are they a friend? Are they a work colleague or are you the manager of the individual? etc. We are often asked at **Equal and Diverse** during our <u>training on equality</u> what to do if you come across unacceptable behaviour. Here is a quick list – by no means exhaustive of some of the things we have discovered:

Not to challenge isn't an option.

One of the most difficult things to do is to do something because doing nothing is actually acquiescing in the behaviour of the discriminator. That isn't to say it is easy but if you do not speak out who is going to? If there is a victim present to whom the discriminatory remark or behaviour is addressed it is perhaps unlikely that they will confront the challenge if they believe that you will fail to support them. In particular if you are a manger you have no option but to challenge discrimination. A barbed wire fence is no place to sit!

Challenge immediately if you can.

The temptation is not to say anything or do anything there and then but that might suggest to others that you are happy with the negative behaviour or prepared to let it slide. If at all possible, and it might not be if it were to cause further offence to a victim, challenge there and then.

Question someone's motivation.

One of the most successful ways of challenging in appropriate behaviour or remarks I to question the motivation of the perpetrator. Ask them questions like, "Why would you say that?" "What evidence do you have for that assertion?" "What are you really trying to say?" "Why are you being so defensive?"

Take your time and step back.

If a situation is becoming over=heated and people are not listening to what is being said and therefore are not hearing then slowing the pace to de-escalate the anger is often helpful. I am not suggesting taking a break because that can just at fire to the angry exchange... but slow down the speed of your conversation... take time, pause and talk quietly. Nothing de-escalates a difficult situation better than dropping the pitch and rhythm of your voice and speaking quietly because if someone else is shouting they are forced to lower their voice to hear you!

If you aren't sure with what is being said get clarification.

If you get someone to stop and reflect on the implications of what they are saying, to try to get them to consider their statement from the perspective of another, especially if it was a statement said about themselves, then all this can help to appropriate challenge someone's negative or

stereotypical thinking. "If a minority person heard you say that, what their reaction would be?" or "If someone said that about you, how would you react?"

Question the factual accuracy of the information being used.

Often individuals will make discriminatory statements such as "all X do or think this." It is often helpful to challenge the basis of these suppositions and discover whether there is any factual accuracy or whether it is merely a stereotypical, knee-jerk discriminatory statement. People often back down and correct themselves if they discover their arguments are flawed.

Use reflection

Reflecting back to someone what is being said and using others can be very helpful – in particular use yourself as a personal reflector of what is being said. Statements such as, "I'm having some difficulty with what you're saying" or "I can't see your point" or "I accept that is how you think, but I find it unacceptable"

Be firm

Sometimes someone says something or undertakes an action which is blatantly unacceptable or discriminatory. On these occasions, if after dialogue and discussion their behaviour continues – you may have to take further action away from the incident or event.

Remember not challenging is accepting and colluding with discrimination.

7.5 Understand why it is important to give both positive and critical feedback to information sources

Providing Feedback to individuals regarding their behaviour work with you is the most powerful motivating you have.

Quite simply, feedback is the sharing of information about the individuals 'behaviour. Positive feedback serves to sustain behaviour that is appropriate and effective. Negative or corrective feedback serves to change behaviour that is inappropriate or ineffective. Thus, the individual should receive a mixture of positive and corrective feedback. The feedback should be specific enough that the individual understands which behaviours are appropriate and which ones need to be changed. General comments such as "you're doing a really super job!" may be pleasant to give, but do little in the way of learning. Feedback is most meaningful when it is based on solid data obtained while observing or interacting with the individual.

This skill quickly becomes easier with deliberate practice. An experienced preceptor who has worked on developing this skill can incorporate feedback comfortably and quickly into regular interactions with a individual.

Definition

Feedback is giving specific information about a person's current behaviour in order to help him/her either continue the behaviour or modify the behaviour.

Purposes

- Provides a basis for maintaining or improving performance
- **Provides a forum for assessing need and planning additional experiences**

Timing and Setting

- Most useful immediately following the experience
- Process established during orientation
- Brief, in-route encounters

Characteristics of Effective Feedback

- It is specific and performance based.
- It is descriptive, not labelling.
- It focuses on the behaviour, not the learner.
- It is based on observations, repeated if possible.
- It begins with "I" statements.
- It balances negative and positive comments.
- It is well-timed.
- It is anchored to common goals (for example, the learner's learning or quality patient care).
- It provides for two-way communication, soliciting, and considering the receiver's input.
- It is brief. (Be alert to signs of resistance).
- It is based on trust, honesty, and concern.
- It is private, particularly if it is negative.
- It is part of your regular teaching process, not an exception to the norm.
- It provides for follow-up.

Guidelines for Giving Constructive Feedback

- All comments should be based upon observable behaviour and not assumed motives or intents.
- Positive comments should be made first in order to give the individual confidence and gain his/her attention.
- Language should be descriptive of specific behaviours rather than general comments indicating value judgments.
- Feedback should emphasize the sharing of information. There should be opportunities for both parties to contribute.
- Feedback should not be so detailed and broad so as to "overload" the individual.
- Feedback should deal with the behaviours the individual can control and change.
- Feedback requires the ability to tolerate a feeling of discomfort.

How to Criticise Constructively

7. **Have good intentions.** Your reason for critiquing someone's work or behavior is going to affect that way you deliver feedback. If you have an ulterior motive outside just wanting to help the person improve, that could come across as overly negative. Reflect on whether you are the right person to give constructive criticism to the person in question, and whether the criticism you intend to impart will actually be productive.

- Many people decide it's OK to criticize someone else "for their own good," but in some cases the criticism can be more harmful than helpful. For example, if you have a friend who has gained a lot of weight since you last saw each other, telling her that she should lose weight for the sake of her health probably won't fall on receptive ears.
- If you are in a position of authority or someone has explicitly asked you for feedback, it's fine to give constructive criticism. For example, if you run a business and it's time for your quarterly check-in with employees, you'll need to be ready to discuss ways the employee can improve.

Ease your way in. The way you present the topic at hand can have a huge effect on how it is received. Couching the criticism in gentle terms is a good way to get your point across without sounding too blunt or harsh.[1] Here are some examples of words you can use to ease your way into giving the critical feedback:

- *You may want to consider changing your approach here.*
- *I noticed these numbers have slipped. Could you tell me why?*
- *Good effort, but I see a few areas that have room for improvement.*

Don't get emotional. If you're giving feedback on a personal matter, you may feel emotional during the conversation. If possible, remove emotion from the situation and attempt to be as objective as possible. If you appear angry or upset, your body language and tone of voice could cause the other person to become defensive and less likely to take your criticism into consideration.

Choose the right time and place. Even if you have the best of intentions and only want to help someone improve, giving critical feedback in front of other people is never a good idea. No one wants to be told they've done something wrong in public. That leads to embarrassment and humiliation, which are the exact emotions you're trying to avoid by being constructive. Plan ahead and find a private place to talk. Make sure you have plenty of time for a full conversation so it doesn't get cut short.

- The environment where you talk should feel neutral and pleasant. If you're speaking with a loved one, it might help to get out of the house and take a walk together, or go for a drive to a place you both like.

- If you're speaking with a colleague or student, meet in a conference room or another neutral space where you can close the door and get some privacy.

Think carefully about critiquing someone's personal traits. Never give unsolicited criticism on someone's looks or personality; it's almost guaranteed to cause hurt feelings. If someone explicitly asks you what you think about his or clothing choices or new hairstyle, it's still important to tread lightly. Stick to matters they have the ability to change, and avoid saying something negative about inherent traits they can't do much to alter.[2]

- Let's say your sister asks you how you think she can improve her cooking. This could be a touchy subject, so be sure to say something positive before you give the criticism. Try something like, *I love the way you make pancakes! You could try cooking your eggs for a minute or two longer, that works for me when I want them to firm up.*

Try the feedback sandwich method. This method is often used by companies to keep up employee morale while also helping people improve, but it's a good method to keep in mind no matter what your relationship with the person you are critiquing may be. Start the conversation with a compliment, bring up the criticism, then mention something else that's positive. Hearing critical feedback sandwiched between positive statements makes the medicine go down much easier.

- Here's an example of an effective feedback sandwich: *Cathy, this piece is exceptionally well organized and easy to read. I'd like to see you flesh out the section on metalworking to include more examples of what not to do. I really appreciate the great list of resources you provided at the end."*

Smile and use warm body language. Let the other person know that you are empathetic. This will help the person feel more at ease, and let them know you've been there, too.
Be honest. The point is to actually help the person get better, so chickening out and glossing over the truth isn't going to serve either of you. Now that you know how to approach the situation in a positive way, it's OK to go ahead and tell the truth as you see it. Be prepared to back off a bit if you see a hurt look on the person's face.

[1]**Be specific.** Giving vague feedback isn't very helpful, especially in a work or school setting. It leaves the person feeling confused about how to better meet your expectations. It's much better to give specific, concrete feedback so that the person knows exactly what changes to make.[4]

- Instead of saying, *You tried hard on this project, but it's incomplete." Say something like, "I see that you made a good effort to track down the best restaurants in town for the newspaper's writeup. The list is complete, but the descriptions of the restaurants need to be more thorough.*

Please expand this with information on what type of food each restaurant serves, their signature dishes, and where they are located.

Focus on the future. There's no point in dwelling on something that has already happened and can't be changed. You can up past mistakes when they are relevant, but be sure to direct the majority of the conversation to goals that can be met in the days or weeks to come.

Don't say too much at once. You don't want to overwhelm the person with too much information. Even if your criticism is couched in positive terms, it will begin to sound like you have a laundry list of issues you want the person to address, and eventually the tone of the conversation will feel negative. Limit your critique to a discussion of a few actionable items. If you have more to address, bring it up in a different conversation.

Encourage the person to come up with solutions. In some cases it might be more appropriate to let the person come up with his or her own solutions, rather than giving your own opinion on what should happen. Once you've stated your critique, ask the person how he or she thinks it should be handled. Engaging the person's ideas for improving can help the conversation feel more positive an productive.

End on a positive note. Don't let the conversation end right after your deliver your critique. Say a few kind words, then change the subject to something else entirely. Don't worry about whether the person will remember the critique – no one ever forgets a criticism they've received. If you end on a sour note, your future attempts to provide constructive criticism will not be welcome.[5]**Talk about progress next time you meet.** Subsequent conversations about the issues you critiqued should focus on progress the person has made. Discuss what concrete steps the person has taken toward the goals you laid out and praise improvements he or she has made. If further changes are necessary, it's fine to bring those up, too.

Know when to stop critiquing. After you've given constructive criticism on a particular topic once or twice, you've probably said enough. Harping on the same issue over and over isn't going to be productive, and could lead to negative feelings on the part of the person you are critiquing. Pick up on cues that the person has had enough, and don't say more until you are asked for your opinion.

If so, share what you know about **washing hemp fabric**.

Please be as detailed as possible in your explanation. We will take your detailed information, edit it for clarity and accuracy, and incorporate it into an article that will help thousands of people.

Tell us everything you know here. Remember, more detail is better.

Timing is everything. Do it when the person is in a good mood. Make sure they are not overtired when you bring up the topic.

- The sandwich formula is typically used in evaluation situations (employee evaluations, for example.) It can also be used, with variations, in any number of other situations. It can often "smooth out" interactions of all kinds.

Warnings

- Pick your battles. Decide if it is really worth criticizing the person. If not, don't. How important is it really?
- Remember, if you criticize someone rudely, that isn't constructive criticism – that's **verbal abuse**!
- Watch your tone and your expression. If you sound and appear holier-than-thou, criticism will not be well received.

8.   Information needed to do your job

8.1 Know what information you should receive from your employer and how to access it

Support workers look after the physical and mental wellbeing of Learning Disability adults in care.

If you enjoy helping people and want to make a difference to their lives, this job could be perfect for you.

In this job, it will be important to get on with people of all ages and backgrounds and gain their trust. You'll need to have understanding and a non-judging attitude.

Some social care employers will be more interested in your work and life experience than formal qualifications, and you can gain these whilst working. You'll need to pass background checks by the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS).

Work activities

As a residential support worker your clients could include children in care, or adults with physical or learning disabilities, mental health problems, addiction issues or other emotional or social needs.

Your day-to-day tasks would vary according to the client group you work with, but might include:

- checking each resident's needs and progress
- providing physical care, which could include bathing, toileting, dressing and feeding
- creating a safe and positive living environment
- setting rules for young people's behaviour
- providing one-to-one counselling or group therapy sessions
- teaching daily living skills such as budgeting, shopping and claiming benefits
- providing leisure and creative activities in a safe and supportive setting
- helping residents to deal with problems and become independent

- liaising with residents' families and arranging family and home visits
- working with other health and care professionals
- acting as a learning support assistant.
- You would also be expected to keep accurate records and write reports. These may be on complex matters affecting individual children or adults, and be used in case reviews and future care plans.

With experience, you could have extra responsibilities including supervising and leading a team, and managing a budget.

Working hours and conditions

In a full-time job you would typically work around 37 to 40 hours a week, often on a shift rota including weekends, evenings and sleep-in duties. You may also be on call at times. Part-time work and job sharing are widely available.

A driving licence could be useful.

The work can be challenging as you may be supporting residents with unpredictable behaviour.

Entry requirements

To work as a support worker, you will need paid or voluntary experience in the social work and care sector. You could get relevant experience in a number of ways, such as:

Qualifications could include:

- Level 2 Certificate/Diploma in Work Preparation for Health and Social Care
- Level 2 GCSE in Health and Social Care
- Level 2 Certificate for the Children and Young People's Workforce
- Level 2 Certificate/Diploma in Youth Work Practice.

Although taking a social care qualification is not essential for finding work, most courses include work placements so this could be a very good way of getting experience.

An alternative route is to take an Apprenticeship where you would be working whilst gaining qualifications. These are available at different levels, depending on your current ability. See the Apprenticeship website for more details.

Apprenticeships

- For any job where you would be working – paid or unpaid – you would need to pass background checks by the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS). Previous convictions or cautions may not automatically prevent you from working in social care. See the DBS website for details.

Training and development

When you start your job, your employer will provide induction training that meets approved national care standards. This may last up to 12 weeks. You would also learn on the job from

experienced staff. The Skills for Care website has more information on induction training and national care standards.

You would be likely to have ongoing professional training throughout your career. This may include short courses given by your employer on topics such as anti-bullying, or dealing with disclosure and effects of abuse. There are also awards or certificates in:

- learning disability
- mental capacity
- activity provision.
- If you became a manager, you could study for the Level 5 Diploma in Leadership for Health and Social Care and Children and Young People's Services (England).

Skills, interests and qualities

To become a residential support worker, you would need to have some or all of the following:

- excellent communication, time management and organisation skills
- the ability to get on with people of all ages and backgrounds and gain their trust
- a practical and flexible approach to work
- tact, patience and understanding
- knowledge of the needs of different client groups
- a non-judging attitude
- the ability to work in a team and also use your initiative
- computer literacy and administration skills
- the ability to assess situations and take action
- mental strength, to cope with challenging situations and clients
- knowledge of child development
- an understanding of how to help children with disabilities to reach their potential
- an understanding of the effects of bereavement, change and loss
- a supportive attitude towards health and wellbeing, and educational achievement
- an understanding of safeguarding issues around vulnerable groups.

The skills required may differ, depending on the age and needs of your client group.

8.2 Know how to agree what information about the individual they are willing to share with others

Presumption of capacity

You must work on the presumption that every adult has the capacity to make decisions about their care, and to decide whether to agree to, or refuse, an examination, investigation or treatment. You must only regard an individual as lacking capacity once it is clear that, having been given all appropriate help and support, they cannot understand, retain, use or weigh up the information needed to make that decision, or communicate their wishes.

No-one can give consent on behalf of another adult with learning disabilities. Parents/relatives or carers should not be asked to sign consent forms.

It must be assumed that every adult has the capacity to consent. The presence of a learning disability or a communication difficulty does not in itself imply incapacity. Many people with learning disabilities can make decisions and express their choices through non-verbal methods of communication.

CONSENT

Consent can be given non-verbally, verbally or in writing.

A signature on a consent form does not itself prove that consent is valid. To give valid consent a person must be able to demonstrate the following 4 stages:

      a) Understand and retain the information.

  b) Communicate their choice.

  c) Understand the risks, benefits, alternatives and consequences.

  d) Weigh up the information to make a decision.

For consent to be valid it must be demonstrated that information has been shared with the patient, about the proposed intervention, in a format that is understandable to the patient. For example, if the person cannot read then photographs or symbols or pictures may be appropriate. To enable patients with a learning disability to make valid decisions about their health, capacity can be maximised by using the following techniques:

- Using simple language, (key words).
- Using illustrations, photographs or practical demonstrations (role play).
- Present information in small chunks.
- Allow plenty of time and encourage question asking.
- Check level of understanding using the preferred method of communication.

GENERAL ADVICE

1. You should establish with the patient what information they want you to share, who with, and in what circumstances. This will be particularly important if the patient has fluctuating or diminished capacity or is likely to lose capacity, even temporarily. Early discussions of this nature can help to avoid disclosures that patients would object to. They can also help to avoid misunderstandings with, or causing offence to, anyone the patient would want information to be shared with.

2. If a patient lacks capacity, you should share relevant information in accordance with the advice with an appropriate person or professional. Unless they indicate otherwise, it is reasonable to assume that individuals would want those closest to them to be kept informed of their general condition and prognosis.

3. If anyone close to the individual wants to discuss their concerns about the individuals health, it should make it clear to them that, while it is not a breach of confidentiality to

listen to their concerns, you cannot guarantee that you will not tell the individual about the conversation. You might need to share with an individual information you have received from others, for example, if it has influenced your assessment and treatment of the individual. You should not refuse to listen to a individual's partner, carers or others on the basis of confidentiality. Their views or the information they provide might be helpful in your care of the individual. You will, though, need to consider whether the individual would consider you listening to the concerns of others about the individuals health or care to be a breach of trust, particularly if they have asked you not to listen to particular people.

9. Information for personal development

9.1 Understand the importance of gathering information as part of your continuing professional development and reflective practice

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is quite simply a means of supporting people in the workplace to understand more about the environment in which they work, the job they do and how to do it better. It is an ongoing process throughout our working lives.

We live in a rapidly changing world where legislative, social and economic developments directly affect the environment in which we live and work, and where technological advances provide radically different ways of working. PD opportunities provide a means whereby we can keep abreast of these changes, broaden our skills and be more effective in our work.

Reflective practice is "the capacity to reflect on action so as to engage in a process of continuous learning". According to one definition it involves "paying critical attention to the practical values and theories which inform everyday actions, by examining practice reflectively and reflexively. This leads to developmental insight".

Reflective practice can be an important tool in practice-based professional learning settings where individuals learning from their own professional experiences, rather than from formal teaching or knowledge transfer, may be the most important source of personal / professional and improvement. Further, it is also an important way to be able to bring together theory and practice; through reflection you are able to see and label schools of thought and theory within the context of your work. What is important about reflection throughout your practice is that you are not just looking back on past actions and events, but rather you are taking a conscious look at the emotions, experiences, actions, and responses, and using that to add to your existing knowledge base to draw out new knowledge, meaning and have a higher level of understanding. As such the notion has achieved wide take-up, particularly in professional development for practitioners in the areas of education and healthcare. The question of how best to learn from experience has wider relevance however, to any organisational learning environment. In particular, people in leadership positions have a tremendous development opportunity if they engage in reflective practice.

9.2 Understand why it is important to develop your own 'skills for life'* in order to provide support for other people

Why is learning and development important?

Learning and development is important because:

- people need to have the opportunity to grow and develop throughout their careers/lives
- organisations can only grow and develop through their people
- successful organisations ensure their people have the appropriate levels of skills, knowledge and attitude to fulfil their roles
- when money is short, only those organisations that are the most efficient and effective will survive – those organisations will need the most efficient and effective people.
- only organisations that can respond to their environment, their customers, etc, and change accordingly will move forward – these organisations will need people that can learn and grow.

How do you ensure your learning and development interventions are worth the investment?

Learning is a major investment for most organisations. Just as for any other investment, it is vital that:

- there is a clear and direct link with the business needs of the organisation
- learning has been identified as the most effective solution of those business needs
- the objectives and outcomes of the learning are well defined and measurable
- the learning is planned to meet those objectives and outcomes in the most cost effective way
- the learning interventions are developed and delivered to meet the needs of the organisation and the individuals.

What is learning needs analysis?

Learning needs analysis is the key to ensuring that learning and development interventions meet organisations' and individuals' needs in a cost effective way.

Job analysis is the first important starting point for all organisations seeking to improve performance. It provides the basis for:

- setting performance standards
- identifying learning and development needs

- assessing performance against those standards.

We offer a flexible and tailored approach in helping organisations carry out their learning needs analysis by, for example:

- analysing jobs in an appropriate format for the organisation and its needs
- identifying the range and extent of the learning needed to meet the requirements of the business now and in the future
- specifying those learning needs precisely
- analysing how the learning needs might best be met
- setting up the basis for the evaluation of the learning process.

9.3 Understand how to keep up to date with developments and best practice

You must keep your knowledge and skills up to date throughout your working life. You should be familiar with relevant guidelines and developments that affect your work. You should regularly take part in educational activities that maintain and further develop your competence and performance.

You must keep up to date with and adhere to, the laws and codes of practice relevant to your work.

The best method to use for keeping-up-to-date will depend on the learning need as well as individual preference and available time. In general, it is most effective to use practical and interactive methods but distance learning methods, such as those using case scenarios on a Learning site, can be very useful:

- Discussions with and learning from partners and other members of the team. This will include informal chats over coffee as well as staff and training meetings.
- Journals: online journals have the advantage of searching archive rather than relying on a relevant article appearing at an appropriate time.
- Textbooks: an important learning tool but may not be as relevant or helpful as other more interactive and more practical methods.
- Local and national study days, courses, conferences.
- Internet resources: for example, journals, learning modules, information sites such as designated websites of various colleges, training sites, government sites
- Attending in house and external training programmes, and specialist training qualifications