



COMMUNICATING TIPS

for working with a person with Down syndrome and/or developmental disability.

People with Down syndrome may have:

- areas of strengths and other areas where they need more support, just like everyone else in the community
- some level of intellectual disability
- some characteristic physical features
- increased risk of some health conditions (many of which are treatable)
- some developmental delays.

Each person with Down syndrome is **unique** like other individuals in the community. They may vary in their ability to process new information, grasp abstract concepts and manipulate ideas. Yet they have **rights** to same level of care as any other individual.

To ensure they are given the same opportunities to good health outcomes, it is helpful to take note of some tips when communicating information particularly in a health setting.

1

ENSURE YOU HAVE THE PERSON'S ATTENTION.

Address the person by name, use eye contact and/or touch. Try not to address the parent/carer first.

2

BE AWARE OF KNOWN COMMUNICATION DIFFICULTIES.

Use **receptive language** in preference to expressive.

- a. **Receptive** – *difficulty understanding.* (e.g. deafness, cognitive impairment, autism spectrum disorder)
- b. **Expressive** - *difficulty being understood.* (e.g., autism spectrum disorder)

3

WHEN UNSURE OF ABILITY TO UNDERSTAND, ASSUME COMPETENCE AND ADJUST ACCORDINGLY.

It is more appropriate and respectful to assume competence than assuming a lack of understanding.

4

**IF UNCERTAIN
ASK ABOUT
COMMUNICATION
PREFERENCES / STYLE /
TECHNIQUES**

- a. How does s/he say prefer to say yes/no?
- b. Does s/he use a communication device or aid?

5

**USE APPROPRIATE
AND RESPECTFUL:**

- a. **Language:**
Simple, clear words and short uncomplicated sentences.
- b. **Visual information:**
Pictures, diagrams, signs, gestures.
- c. **Tone and volume:**
A respectful approach reflects your degree of familiarity with the person, their age, and the context of your interaction.
- d. **Interpreter if required.**

6

**WAIT FOR
A RESPONSE.**

Allow person time to listen, process what you say and respond. **DONT RUSH!**

7

**CHECK
UNDERSTANDING IN
THE PERSON'S OWN
WORDS.**

Do not simply ask "do you understand?" (Most people say "yes"!)

Remember: receptive language may be better than expressive language (or vice versa).

8

**BE HONEST AND TAKE
RESPONSIBILITY FOR
COMMUNICATION
BREAKDOWNS .**

e.g. I am sorry I'm not understanding.
NEVER PRETEND to understand!

Communicate
with **HONESTY.**

9

**IF THEY DON'T UNDERSTAND
- KEEP TRYING**

- Repeat.
- Use clear simple words and concepts.
- Say it in a different way.
- Use different words.
- Use pictures.

10

**IF YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND
- KEEP TRYING.**

Try alternative strategies.

- a. Would you say that again please?
- b. Is there another way you can think of saying it?
- c. Could you use another word? Could you show me?
- d. Is there someone who could help us? Involve family member/carer/support worker if appropriate
- remember to ASK FIRST.



Always communicate
with RESPECT.






Adapted from: *Working with people with developmental disabilities in healthcare setting*
- The Centre for Developmental Disability Health Victoria ~ Better Health, Better Lives ~

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Disclaimer

The information in this resource is general in nature and does not constitute advice. Down Syndrome Western Australia will not be held responsible for any decisions made as a result of using this information. The contents of the resource do not constitute medical and legal advice and should not be relied on as such.

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