

7-minute briefing on **WHAT IS COMMUNICATION?**

1. Communication and Mental Capacity

Clear communication is key to assessing a person's mental capacity. It is included in Principle 2 of the MCA Code of Practice and referred to throughout the code.

Communication is the act of transferring information from one place, person, or group to another. Every communication involves at least one sender, a message, and a recipient. This may sound simple, but communication is actually very complex, and has a huge impact when it goes wrong.

2. Did you know?

- Nearly 20% of the population may experience communication difficulties at some point in their lives
- 7% of children aged about 5 years have a specific speech and language impairment, and a further 1.8% have speech, language and communication needs linked to other conditions such as learning disability, autistic spectrum conditions, cerebral palsy.
- In some socially deprived areas upwards of half children may start school with impoverished speech, language and communication skills.
- Around one third of people will have some level of communication difficulties (called aphasia) following a stroke.
- More than 60% of young offenders can have difficulties with speech, language, and communication skills
- 20% of people with head or brain injury have speech difficulties.
- 50-90% of people with learning disabilities have communication difficulties.
- Mental health difficulties can have a significant impact on language and communication skills (60-80% in one study).

3. Receptive Language

Receptive language means the ability to understand information. It involves understanding the words, sentences and meaning of what others say or what is read.

Receptive language often depends on understanding the context of what is being said, for example, the word "fast" can mean going quickly, however if we talk about being "stuck fast" the word means the opposite.

4. Expressive Language

Expressive language means being able to put thoughts into words and sentences (using any means of communication), in a way that makes sense and is grammatically accurate. Expressive language also informs an individual's writing skills.

5. Social Language

Social language has 3 components:

- The ability to use language for different purposes (greet others, request a pay rise, build relationships)
- The ability to adapt language to meet the needs of the listener or situation (talking differently to a baby versus talking to an adult, being aware of the listener's knowledge of a situation and giving more or less information)
- Following the unspoken rules of conversation (taking turns, standing at the right distance, using volume well, using gestures right for the situation). These rules are often different across families and cultures.

6. Signs of difficulty

- Slow, confused or inaccurate responses
- The person may only respond to part of the question
- Difficulties with providing information in a logical sequence
- May find it difficult to give the right amount of information
- Difficulties remembering times, dates or details of events
- May take information literally, or find sarcasm difficult to understand
- May use yes/no responses more frequently than you would expect
- May have difficulties with literacy
- May repeat back what you have said, but not add their own details

7. What can we do to help?

- Choose the best location at the best possible time
- Speak in the here and now – use present tense
- Chunk information into smaller pieces – think one idea per sentence
- Tell people what to do rather than what not to do – negative statements can be more difficult to understand
- Check understanding at each point – don't say "do you understand", ask "what have we planned", "explain what we have talked about"
- Use concrete words for time – Sunday, rather than yesterday
- Think about the words you use – does the person know what the words mean? Can you use a simpler word?
- Avoid using hinting, sarcasm and non-literal language (we're in a jam/do you want a cuppa)
- Use visuals to support the conversation – drawing out choices or consequences gives the person time to process the information.