

Communication Supports for People who have Speech, Language and Communication Disabilities



Communication Disabilities
Canada Access

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS

People who have speech, language and communication disabilities¹ may require communication supports to use your services and provide informed consent. The right to communication supports is protected by Canadian and international laws.²

The following questions are intended to guide you in developing your organization's policies as well as documenting an individual's personal communication supports. Please note that these guidelines are generic and are not context or disability specific.

To learn about communication supports, go to www.cdacanada.com/communication-supports-article-12.

SUPPORTS FOR PEOPLE WHO SPEAK, WRITE, TYPE, POINT TO PICTURES, SYMBOLS OR LETTERS ON A BOARD, OR USE A COMMUNICATION DEVICE.

1. Identifying Communication Support Needs

Do you have policies, procedures and documentation to:

- Identify a person's communication support needs in the areas of understanding, expressive communication, assistance with decision-making, reading, writing, and telephone use.
- Find out if any accompanying persons have specific support roles such as, communication assistance, proxy communication, advocacy, informal decision supporter and if applicable, legal decision-making roles such as a substitute decision-maker or supported decision-maker as per Canadian jurisdiction.
- Provide extra time and a quiet, distraction-free environment for communication.
- Determine what, if any, information the individual wants shared with support person(s).
- Obtain signed confidentiality agreements from support person(s), if required.
- Engage a Speech-Language Pathologist, if required.³

2. Supports for Understanding Spoken and Written Information

If required by the individual, do you have policies, procedures and documentation to:

- Provide communication supports as identified by the individual. For example: using everyday language; eliminating jargon and terminology; slowing rate of speech; pausing between sentences; chunking information; focusing attention; supporting reduced memory, and using language that is within the person's lived experience.
- Provide visual supports to facilitate understanding of information such as objects, pictures, diagrams, maps, written text, and social stories.
- Provide written information in accessible formats, such as plain language, large font, electronic format, accessible website and digital information.
- Engage an authorized support person to assist the individual in understanding spoken and/or written information.
- Demonstrate the individual's understanding of critical information to make an informed decision.

3. Supports for Expressive Communication

If required by the individual, do you have policies, procedures and documentation to:

- Provide expressive communication supports as identified by the individual. For example: use of preferred communication methods for face-to-face interactions; home language, and customized strategies to facilitate expressive communication.
- Ensure the individual has access to their personal communication aid at all times. For example: a picture, symbol, letter board, boogie board, pen and paper, tablet, smart phone or communication device.
- Provide topic boards, written key words and vocabulary, if required to communicate about a specific issue.
- Engage an authorized person to interpret and assist with communication, if required, and ensure that they accurately convey messages as generated, and approved by the individual being supported.
- Provide support for writing such as accessible forms, assistance to complete forms, sign documents, take notes.
- Provide alternative to telephone use if required, such as text, email, or contact information for an authorized person.

4. Supports for Decision-Making

If required by the individual, do you have policies, procedures and documentation to:

- Provide information about local legislation related to the decision-making context.
- Ensure that decision-making is not deferred to unauthorized persons.
- Provide the individual with the option to get assistance from others to make a decision.
- Ensure access to the communication supports the individual may need when being assisted to make decisions.
- Determine that there is no evidence of undue persuasion, coercion or abuse of power.
- Determine that the individual's preferences and decisions are acknowledged, honored and /or negotiated.
- Determine if the decision was made independently; within a shared or supported decision-making arrangement as per Canadian jurisdiction or via a substitute decision maker.

SUPPORTS FOR PEOPLE WHO COMMUNICATE PRIMARILY THROUGH BODY LANGUAGE, VOCALIZATIONS, FACIAL EXPRESSIONS AND BEHAVIOURS.

Do you have policies, procedures and documentation to:

- Determine the individual's decision-making status relative to the legal context of the decision to be made.
- Identify the individual's legal decision-maker.
- Ensure input from people who know the individual well and have a long-term, close relationship with the individual.
- Acknowledge, act on and take into account an individual's known past and current preferences and non-preferences, will, values and beliefs, and specific intersectionality needs relating to health, emotional wellbeing, home language, gender, sexuality, religion, spirituality, ethnicity, culture, safety from abuse, neglect, self-harm or harm to others.

1. People who have speech, language and communication disabilities, not primarily caused by hearing loss may have cerebral palsy, cognitive, intellectual or developmental disability, learning disability, foetal alcohol syndrome, Down Syndrome, autism spectrum disorder, multiple sclerosis, Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, aphasia, dementia, acquired or traumatic brain injury, head and neck cancer, Parkinson's disease and other disabilities.
2. Human rights laws; Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms; United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; Accessibility laws.
3. A Speech Language Pathologist may be required if a person has no obvious way of communicating, if capacity to provide informed consent is questionable, if there is evidence of a conflict of interest, undue persuasion or coercion from support person(s) and in all critical communication contexts such as medical assistance in dying and justice settings.