

MODULE 2

Inclusive Communication Training Packages

Get Started





We respectfully acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the Country throughout Australia, and their continuing connection to land, water and community. We pay our respect to Traditional Custodians, our Elders both past and present and acknowledge the Aboriginal people of the nations that we have the privilege to live and work on.

We share and celebrate the rich history of Aboriginal culture, and recognise the diverse and proud Aboriginal nations across Australia.

We recognise those with lived experience of communication support needs in Australia. We acknowledge that we can only provide quality care through valuing, respecting and drawing upon the lived experience and expert knowledge of consumers, their families, carers and friends, staff and the local communities.

We acknowledge their contribution and guidance in our attempts to create more inclusive health care settings.

What we'll cover...

- 1 Introduction to Communication
- 2 Communication Support Needs
- 3 Inclusive Communication
- 4 Early identification
- 5 Access checks
- 6 Communication Strategies

1

Introduction to Communication



What is Communication?

Communication is the process of exchanging information, ideas, and feelings between individuals or groups. It involves sending and receiving messages through various methods like speaking, writing, or gestures.

Communication takes many forms, including:

- Talking
- Listening
- Reading
- Writing
- Specific behaviours
- Non-word sounds
- Gestures
- Facial expressions
- Touch
- Visuals, drawings and images
- Signing
- Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC)

Communication helps us:



Build relationships



Solve problems



Foster understanding



Connect and work together

Key Elements of Communication

Sender



The person who starts the communication by sharing a message.

Message



The information or idea the sender wants to convey.

Channel



The way the message is sent, like talking face-to-face or sending an email.

Receiver



The person who gets the message and understands it.

Feedback



The response or reaction from the receiver to the message.

Context



The situation or setting where the communication happens.



Good communication helps people connect and work together more effectively in various settings, from workplaces to personal relationships.

What is Alternative and Augmentative Communication

Alternative and Augmentative Communication, also known as AAC, refers to a set of tools, techniques, and strategies that support individuals with communication support needs.

AAC methods range from:

- Using signs and gestures
- Simple picture cards
- Communication boards
- High-tech devices and apps



All AAC methods are designed to help individuals express themselves effectively when speech alone is challenging or insufficient.

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Communication Support Needs



What are Communication Support Needs?

Communication support needs refer to conditions that affect an individual's ability to send, receive, or comprehend verbal and nonverbal messages effectively. These disabilities can manifest in various forms and may involve impairments in speech, language, or cognitive functions. Communication support needs can range from mild to severe and can significantly impact an individual's ability to communicate and interact with others in daily life.



Any condition, impairment, or difficulty that impacts how someone sends, receives, or understands information



Can be mild or severe, long-term or temporary



What are Communication Support Needs?

The term “communication support needs” is used interchangeably with the terms “communication difficulty” and “communication disability”. A 2024 report from Speech Pathology Australia identified “communication support needs” as the preferred terminology of people with lived experience - we will predominantly use this term although you may see the use of other terms as well.

1.2M

In 2015, an Australian Bureau of Statistics report found that 1.2 million Australians identified as having communication support needs.

Understanding the Terminology

Communication Disability

Communication Difficulty

**Communication Support
Needs**

Mean the same thing, but each person may have a preference for which term they like to use



Always ask individuals which term they prefer — language matters.

Types of Communication Support Needs



Speech Disorders

Speech disorders involve difficulties with the production of speech sounds, resulting in unclear or unintelligible speech.

COMMON TYPES INCLUDE:

Stuttering

Repetition, prolongation, or blockage of sounds or syllables, disrupting the flow of speech.

Dysarthria

Impairment in the muscles used for speech production, leading to slurred or imprecise speech.

Apraxia of Speech

Difficulty planning and coordinating the movements necessary for speech, resulting in inconsistent speech errors.

Types of Communication Support Needs



Language Disorders

Language disorders affect an individual's ability to understand and use language effectively. These disorders may involve difficulties with understanding and/or using language.

COMMON TYPES INCLUDE:

Aphasia

Impairment in language comprehension or expression due to damage to the brain, often resulting from stroke or traumatic brain injury.

Developmental Language Disorder

Delay or impairment in the development of language skills, which may persist into adulthood.

Specific Language Impairment

Difficulty with language acquisition and use in the absence of other developmental or neurological conditions.

Types of Communication Support Needs



Cognitive Impairments

Cognitive impairments refer to deficits in cognitive functions such as memory, attention, and problem-solving, which can impact communication abilities.

COMMON TYPES INCLUDE:

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Neurodevelopmental disorder characterised by challenges in social communication and interaction, as well as restricted interests and repetitive behaviours.

Intellectual Disabilities

Limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviour, affecting communication, social skills, and daily living activities.

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

Damage to the brain caused by external force or injury, resulting in cognitive, physical, or behavioural impairments, including difficulties with communication and social interaction.

Examples of communication support needs you may encounter



- A patient with speech difficulties as a result of cerebral palsy, who finds it difficult to express their concerns in an examination
- Someone who has trouble understanding care instructions after a procedure because of aphasia following a stroke.
- A teenager with autism spectrum disorder, who has sensory needs and gets overwhelmed by bright lights and busy waiting rooms
- A child with a developmental language disorder who cannot tell others when they are in pain or discomfort during a procedure.
- A person who is hard of hearing and can't understand information over the phone, therefore needs information presented in a different format and/or may need an interpreter



It's crucial to recognise and cater to communication disabilities to ensure inclusive, patient-centred care for individuals with various communication support needs.

Examples of communication support needs you may encounter



- Invisible disabilities, like communication support needs, are conditions or impairments that aren't immediately obvious to others but significantly affect how someone lives and their quality of life.
- Unlike visible disabilities, such as mobility issues or physical impairments, communication disabilities may not be apparent at first glance. People with these disabilities might seem typical outwardly but struggle with communication and social interactions.
- These disabilities can greatly impact daily life, affecting education, work, healthcare, and social activities. Communication disabilities can be temporary or permanent. They can fluctuate due to a range of personal and external factors. Some people have lifelong communication disability.



It's crucial to recognise and cater to communication disabilities to ensure inclusive, patient-centred care for individuals with various communication support needs.

Examples of communication support needs you may encounter



- Challenges in expressing themselves, understanding instructions, and engaging in conversations create barriers to fully participating in society.
- People with communication support needs often encounter obstacles in accessing necessary services like healthcare, education, and jobs. Misunderstandings and stigma surrounding these disabilities can lead to social isolation and discrimination.
- Effective communication with healthcare providers can be particularly challenging for individuals with communication support needs. This can result in disparities in healthcare access and outcomes, including misdiagnosis, inadequate treatment, and poorer health outcomes.



It's crucial to recognise and cater to communication disabilities to ensure inclusive, patient-centred care for individuals with various communication support needs.

Impact in Healthcare Settings

Effective communication with healthcare providers can be particularly challenging for individuals with communication support needs. This can result in significant disparities in care.



Suffer from adverse events in healthcare settings



Report higher levels of dissatisfaction with care



Experience interactions that are frustrating and ineffective



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Inclusive Communication



Communication is a Human Right

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media.”

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

“People with disability have the right to express themselves, including through accessible formats and technologies, sign languages, Braille, augmentative and alternative communication.”



In Australia, all businesses, government agencies, organisations, and service providers are required by law to be accessible and inclusive.

Communication is a Human Right



Communication is a Human Right

Not everyone has equal access to communication. Some individuals, like those with communication support needs, face obstacles that make it hard for them to fully engage in communication. These barriers can include misunderstandings, places that aren't easy to use, not enough help with communication, and unhelpful attitudes from society.

An environment that includes everyone and is easy to use means everyone, no matter how they communicate, feels important, respected, and ready to take part in communication.



Every person has the fundamental right to communicate, express themselves, and be part of sharing information and ideas.

Key features of an inclusive environment



Respect and Dignity

Everyone gets treated with respect and dignity, no matter how they communicate.



Direct Communication

People talk directly to those who need communication help, making sure they're seen as equals in the conversation.



Patience and Understanding

People get the time they need to share their thoughts and feelings clearly.



Active Listening

People listen closely and kindly, so they really understand what others are saying.



Support for Different Ways of Communicating

People are ready to help with things like different devices or methods for communicating, so everyone's needs are met.



Every person has the fundamental right to communicate, express themselves, and be part of sharing information and ideas.

Who is accessible communication for?

Accessible communication can support a wide range of individuals who might benefit from specific communication support, including:



People with intellectual disabilities

Benefit from simplified language and visual aids.



People on the autism spectrum

Benefit from structured communication and pictograms.



People with neurological injuries

Benefit from clear, concise communication and visual supports.



People with sensory disorders

May need accessible formats such as Braille, sign language, or captions.



People with psychosocial disabilities

Benefit from patient and supportive communication styles to reduce anxiety.



Accessible communication promotes equal access to information and participation in society for everyone.

Who is accessible communication for?

Accessible communication can support a wide range of individuals who might benefit from specific communication support, including:



44% of Australian adults with functional literacy below early high school level

Benefit from plain language, visuals, and audio formats.



People who speak English as a second language

Benefit from simplified language, visuals, and interpreter services.



People experiencing emotional distress or stressful events

Benefit from calm, empathetic communication.



People dealing with information overload

Benefit from segmented information, key points highlighted, and clear visuals.



Accessible communication promotes equal access to information and participation in society for everyone.

Accessible Environments and Universal Design

Universal Design is a concept that involves creating products, environments, and systems that everyone can use easily, no matter their age, abilities, or situation.

Initially focused on physical spaces, Universal Design now applies to how we communicate. For physical spaces, it might mean having ramps, sturdy handrails, and wide doorways. For communication, it means designing information and environments so everyone can participate.

Universal Design in Communication Settings



Low Stimulation Environments

Providing quiet spaces in public places like shopping malls or recreation centres, so people with sensory sensitivities—like those with autism spectrum disorder—can feel more comfortable



Hearing Loops

Installing hearing loops or other systems in places like theatres or lecture halls to help people with hearing impairments hear better.



Communication Boards

Making communication boards easily accessible in places like playgrounds or parks, so people with speech or language disabilities can communicate more easily.

Benefits of Universal Design



Inclusivity

Ensure that everyone, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, can fully participate in community life and access essential services and resources.



Equity

By incorporating Universal Design principles, communities promote equity and social justice by removing barriers to participation and fostering a sense of belonging for all individuals.



Cost-Effectiveness

While implementing Universal Design features may require initial investment, they often result in long-term cost savings by reducing the need for retrofits or specialised accommodations.



Universal Design does not just help people with disabilities — it improves the experience for everyone.

Reasonable Adjustments

Reasonable adjustments are changes made to communication to help everyone understand and participate. For people with communication support needs, these adjustments might include using simple language, showing pictures, or giving extra time to process information. It's about making sure everyone can communicate in a way that works best for them, so no one is left out or feels left behind.



Reasonable Adjustments



When we talk about reasonable adjustments for people with communication support needs, we're essentially talking about levelling the playing field. It's about recognising that everyone communicates differently and making sure that everyone has the tools they need to express themselves and be understood. These adjustments can take many forms, from using visual aids like pictures or written instructions to allowing more time for someone to respond. By making these adjustments, we're not just accommodating people with communication needs – we're creating a more inclusive environment where everyone can fully participate and engage.

Models of Disability

Traditional Medical Model

Focus: The traditional medical model views disability primarily as an individual impairment or health condition that needs to be diagnosed, treated, and cured. The emphasis is on fixing the person's impairment to make them more "normal" or conforming to societal standards.

Impairment-Centric: In this model, the focus is on the individual's impairment or condition, often overlooking the broader societal factors that contribute to disability.

Approach: Interventions under the medical model typically involve medical treatments, therapies, or assistive devices aimed at managing or alleviating the symptoms of the impairment.

"Your impairment is the problem
— we need to fix it."

Social Model of Disability

Focus: The social model of disability shifts the focus from the individual's impairment to the social, environmental, and attitudinal barriers that hinder their full participation and inclusion in society.

Barriers-Centric: In this model, disability is seen as a result of societal barriers, such as physical barriers, lack of accessibility, discriminatory attitudes, and social exclusion.

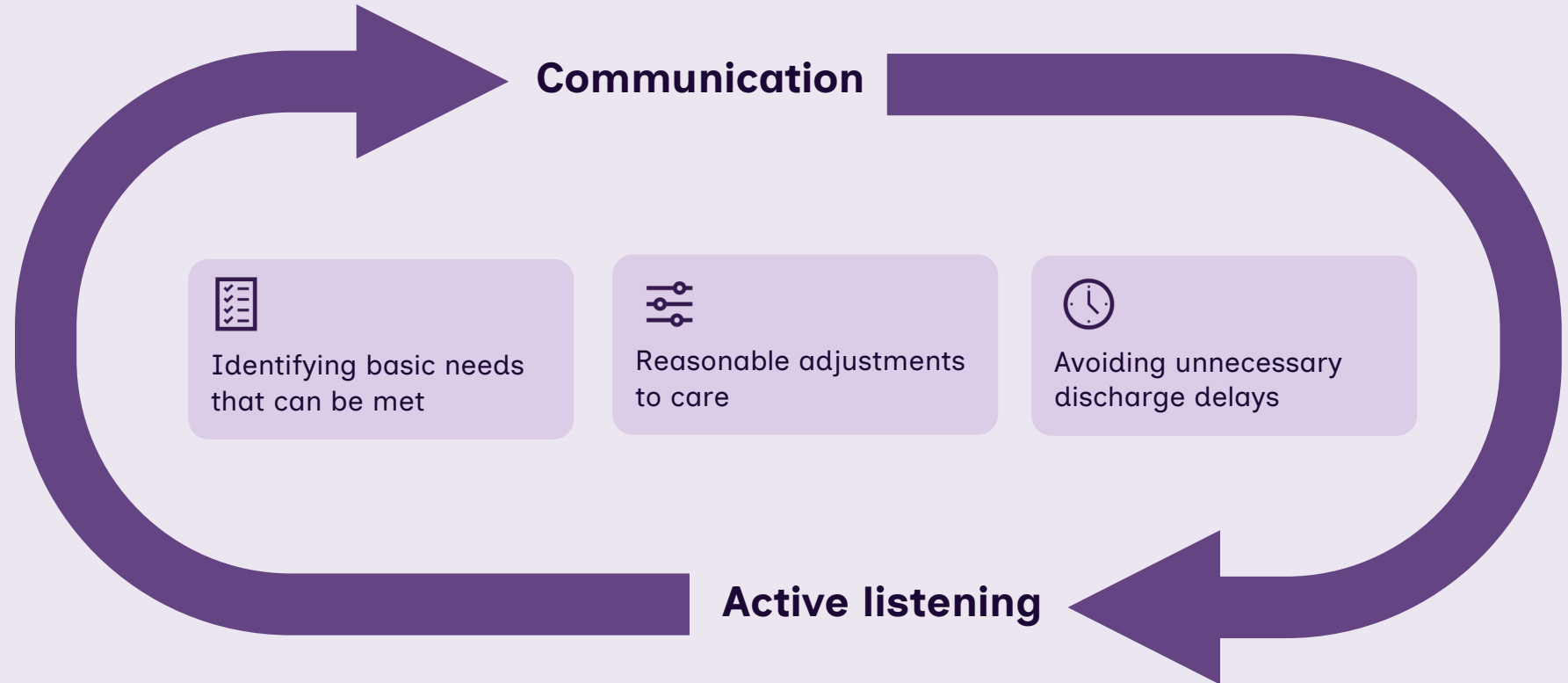
Approach: Interventions under the social model aim to dismantle these barriers and create a more inclusive and accessible environment for individuals with disabilities. This may involve changes in policies, practices, and attitudes to promote equal opportunities and participation

"This barrier is the problem
— we need to fix it."

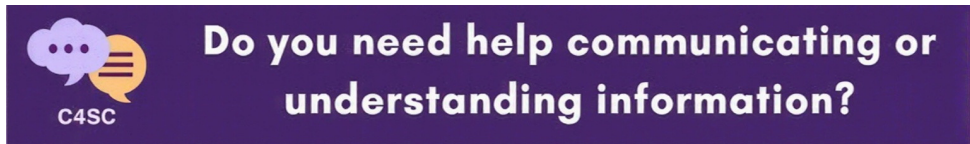
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Early Identification

Importance of Early identification



Identifying communication support needs

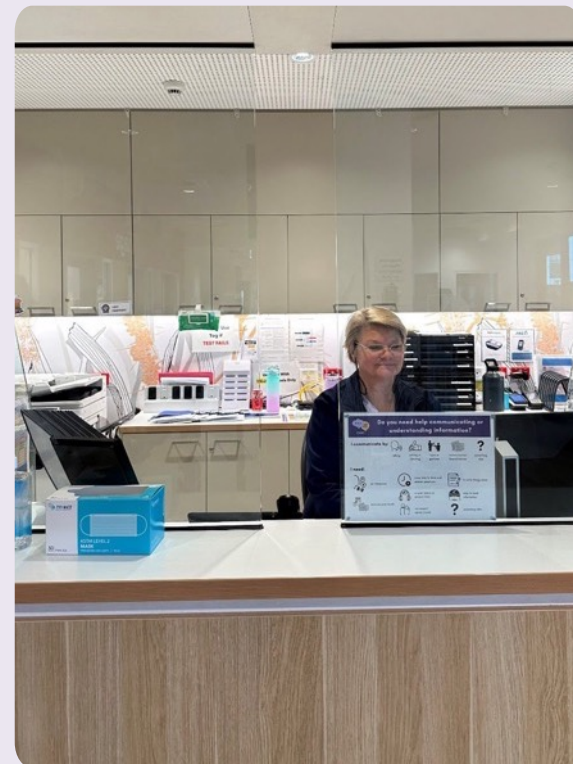


I communicate by:

- talking
- writing or drawing
- signs or gestures
- communication board/device
- something else

I need:

- an interpreter
- more time to think and answer questions
- to write things down
- pictures and visuals
- a quiet space or sensory tools
- easy to read information
- my support person/carer
- something else



Identifying communication support needs



5

Access Checks



Access Checks

Access Checks are a way to ask patients about their preferences, supports, and adjustments.

It ensures patients and carers:

Feel safe and supported in the hospital

Understand information about their health

Can participate in discussions

Make informed decisions



Access Checks



Communication



Environment
(physical and sensory)



Tools and Supports

Access Checks: Tips



Don't make assumptions

Be respectful and non-judgmental

Practice active listening

Know what you can and cannot offer

Listen to their support person

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Communication Strategies



Effective Communication Strategies

Effective communication goes beyond just sharing information—it's about establishing trust, ensuring clarity, and forming genuine connections with patients. Using various communication methods can boost patient satisfaction, improve treatment outcomes, and enhance the overall healthcare experience. By speaking clearly, using visual aids, showing empathy, and listening attentively, professionals can create a welcoming environment where patients feel respected and understood.

Communication strategies should be tailored according to the individual's specific communication support needs. Let's delve into key communication strategies that can improve patient interactions and raise the standard of care delivered.



Effective Communication Strategies



Speak Clearly

Use clear, simple language and speak at a moderate pace to ensure patients understand you. Avoid medical jargon or complex terms that may confuse patients.



Utilise Visual Aids

Supplement verbal explanations with visual aids like diagrams or models. Visuals can enhance understanding, especially for patients who may have difficulty processing spoken information.



Allow Sufficient Time

Give patients ample time to process information and ask questions. Rushing through explanations can leave patients feeling overwhelmed or uncertain about their treatment.

Effective Communication Strategies



Attention to Body Language

Pay attention to patients' body language and facial expressions to gauge their understanding and comfort level. Nonverbal cues can provide valuable insights into patients' emotions and concerns.



Use Gestures and Facial Expressions

Use gestures and facial expressions to convey empathy and reassurance. A warm smile or a comforting touch can go a long way in making patients feel at ease during their visit.



Maintain Appropriate Eye Contact

Maintain eye contact with patients to establish rapport and convey attentiveness. However, be mindful not to appear intimidating or overly intense, as this can be off-putting to some patients.

Effective Communication Strategies



Acknowledge Patients' Feelings

Demonstrate empathy by acknowledging patients' feelings and concerns. Let them know that you understand and care about their experience, fostering trust and rapport.



Practice Active Listening

Engage in active listening by paraphrasing patients' statements and asking clarifying questions. This shows patients that you value their input and are genuinely interested in understanding their needs.



Involve Patients in Decision-Making

Involve patients in decisions regarding their health, respecting their autonomy and preferences. Collaborative decision-making empowers patients and promotes a patient-centred approach to treatment.

Tailoring Communication to Individual Needs

In healthcare, it's important to understand that people with communication support needs have different ways of communicating. Effective communication means professionals need to adjust how they interact with each patient.



Tailoring Communication to Individual Needs

Tips for better communication



Recognise Diversity

People with communication support needs have varying abilities to communicate. Some might find it hard to speak, while others use sign language or communication boards. Acknowledging this diversity is crucial for good communication.



Use Simple Language and Visual Aids

Using plain language and visual aids can help people with communication support needs understand better. Avoiding complicated medical terms and using clear, simple words ensures patients grasp care instructions. Visual aids like pictures, diagrams, or written instructions can reinforce what's being said and improve understanding.



Adapt Communication Methods

Communication methods should match each person's abilities, sensory preferences, and cultural background. For example, some patients might need more time to process information or prefer repeated instructions. Others may have sensory hypersensitivities, so adjusting the environment (like using quiet spaces or dimming lights) can help. Considering cultural differences, like language preferences or communication norms, ensures respectful and effective communication.



By recognising diverse communication needs and adapting their methods, health workers create a supportive, inclusive environment — ensuring every patient is cared for with dignity and respect.

Practical: Case Studies



Case Study 1: Alex – Oral Health

Patient Profile



Name: Alex

Age: 25

Diagnosis: Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Communication Style: Limited verbal communication; prefers non-verbal communication and visual cues.

Alex presents at the clinic independently for a routine check-up. He has a history of sensory hypersensitivities and anxiety, which can affect his ability to tolerate certain procedures.

He communicates primarily through gestures, facial expressions, and occasional single-word responses.

As Alex enters, he appears visibly anxious, fidgeting with his hands and avoiding eye contact. He is fixated on a squishy stress ball he brought with him.

Case Study 1: Alex – Communication Challenges

 What communication support needs and strategies might apply here?



Limited verbal communication

Alex struggles to express concerns verbally. He may respond with single-word replies or remain silent.



Sensory hypersensitivities

Bright lights, loud noises, and unfamiliar sensations can overwhelm Alex and exacerbate his anxiety.



Difficulty with transitions

Alex may have difficulty transitioning between different stages of the appointment, such as moving from the waiting area to the clinic room.

Case Study 1: Alex – Communication Strategies

1

Establish Rapport: Address Alex by name and speak in a calm, reassuring tone. Acknowledge his stress ball and ask if it helps with anxiety.

2

Non-Verbal Communication: Use gentle touch or nodding to convey empathy. Pay close attention to his body language and facial expressions.

3

Visual Supports: Show a visual schedule of the appointment steps. Provide picture cards or a communication board for Alex to express needs.

4

Choice and Autonomy: Offer choices wherever possible — e.g. selecting flavoured toothpaste or deciding when to take breaks.

5

Reduce Sensory Stimuli: Dim lights, use soothing background music, and provide weighted blankets or sensory headphones if requested.



Outcome

With these strategies, Alex gradually relaxes and cooperates during the examination. Positive experiences build trust over multiple appointments.

Case Study 2: Jane

Patient Profile



Name: Jane

Age: 35

Pronouns: She/Her

Communication Support Need:

Hard of hearing and prefers to communicate in Auslan. Difficulties hearing and understanding spoken information. Jane can lip read some words.

Jane's barriers to good communication

- No visuals available for Jane to use or to self-identify that she has communication support needs
- No-one checking that she understands

The Outcome

- Jane's visit to the ED was challenging
- She wasn't able to communicate in her preferred way

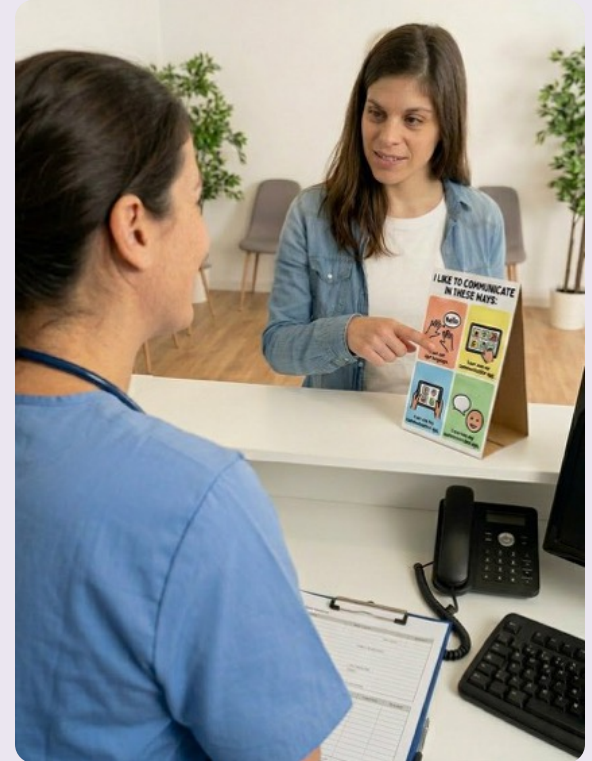
Case Study 2: Jane

? What happens when we make reasonable adjustments?

If a communication board was present, Jane would be able to notify someone that she is Deaf, and in pain. It would also allow her to notify someone that she'd like an Auslan interpreter.

Both reception and triage would know to talk slowly and allow time for Jane to lip read.

Jane would feel safe and supported, and follow her discharge instructions.





That's a wrap

You've completed Module 2:
Inclusive Communication Training Packages