

# SUPPORTING A PERSON'S THINKING AND COMMUNICATION

People with disability may need various types of support when making a training video for their support workers. This document gives some practical examples of ways a person may need to be supported with their thinking or communication.

## BASIC PRINCIPLES

- **Always assume a person wants to communicate and has knowledge to share.** People are experts about themselves and want to be heard and understood. People who cannot verbalise communicate in other ways and your job is to support them participate as much as possible. Equally, people who have challenges with their memory, problem-solving or insight also have important things to tell their support workers. While they may not be able to tell the whole story, it is important that you facilitate them to tell as much of their story as possible.
- **Training videos are to be led by the person with disability.** This means you should give them the time in conversations to use their own words, make decisions, and prioritise what they think is most important. You may disagree with their choices and this is ok as long as their safety is not at risk. It is important to check with relevant members of the person's support team (see Guide, Before you Start section) about strategies chosen to show in the video. They will help you and the person decide if something is not safe or appropriate for a video.
- **Use the knowledge you have already.** You have been chosen as a support person because you know the person with disability well and are trusted by them. If support is needed to fill in gaps in information, use what you know about the person to make respectful suggestions about what they may like to include. Remember to phrase suggestions as questions that the person can either accept or say 'no' to. See the section below on ideas for how to do this.
- **Remember that every person is unique.** Not all strategies listed below will apply to every person with challenges in a particular area. If you are not sure which areas of thinking skills a person may have difficulty with, see if you can speak to the person's speech pathologist, occupational therapist or psychologist. Whenever possible, negotiate the strategies you will use to support the person with the person. This means taking time to get agreement about strategies.

"How can I support you with your memory?" (Pause for a response)

If there is no response or you have extra ideas, say something like:

"Tell me the parts you remember about what a support worker needs to do. Then I will give you some more ideas from what I already know about you?"



## SUPPORT FOR SPECIFIC CHALLENGES

### Support for attention (focusing on the conversation) and fatigue

- Keep the environment quiet and free of distractions and background noise.
- Only say what is really necessary, in as few words as possible. Use short sentences and do not talk too fast. Extra words and talking use energy from the brain. Talking less is difficult! Think about things you say that may not need to be said, for example, giving too many explanations.
- Negotiate how often a person needs a break so that they can think as clearly as possible.
- Be prepared to plan and make the video over multiple days.
- Schedule video-making sessions when you know the person is least likely to be tired (e.g. first thing in the morning or after a rest).
- For people who talk too much or have difficulty switching off from thinking about something and moving to the next idea, be very clear.

You can say:



"We have just talked about \_\_\_\_\_. You have decided to \_\_\_\_\_. We are finished talking about that now, ok? Let's change topics to talk about \_\_\_\_\_."

- Other people can get distracted in a conversation and change topics too quickly, before completing an idea or task.

It can be helpful to say:



"Let's write this idea down for in a minute. I noticed we didn't finish talking about \_\_\_\_\_. Let's finish that thought and then we can talk about \_\_\_\_\_."

## Supporting someone who cannot verbalise (talk using speech)

- Make sure the person has access to any communication devices or aids they normally use.
- Encourage the person to do whatever they can to express their thoughts in a conversation. This might include: using a communication device; providing paper or a whiteboard for a person to write or draw; drawing pictures or writing key words to support someone to make a choice between two things; or encouraging the person to show you or use actions and gestures.
- If the person can only communicate 'yes' or 'no', make sure you involve them in choices whenever possible. This can be done by phrasing choices as a question where the answer is either 'yes' or 'no'.

For example:



"Choose what your support worker should do first. Here are two options.

Put your shoes on first or put your belt on first. Let me say them again.

You can say 'yes' or 'no'. Put your shoes on first – 'yes' or 'no'?" Pause. "Put your belt on first – 'yes' or 'no'?" Pause, then check in. "So you want your support worker to put your shoes on first?" Wait for confirmation.

## Supporting someone to understand

- Use the simplest words you can. For example, use the word choose instead of make a decision about.
- Use words that are clear so the person does not have to problem-solve to understand what you mean.
- Pause after each main idea. This can help someone process before giving their brain more information to deal with.
- Use written words, actions or gestures as well as speech for key ideas.
- If the person is able, ask them to tell you what they have understood after any important points (e.g. decisions) OR summarise any key points in the conversation and ask them to say 'yes' or 'no' to "does that make sense to you?"

## Support for planning and initiation (getting started)

- People with planning difficulties may put ideas in the wrong order. Write out the steps in a task so that they do not have to hold information in their head too much.



Use cues like:

"What would need to happen next?"

- If some steps are left out



Use cues like:

"Is there anything else?"..."I think there might be a step missing..."

If the person cannot come up with the step, suggest what it might be and get their permission to include it.

- For getting started



You can say:

"Is it ok if I say the first step to get you going?" Then, "what comes next?"

## Support for problem-solving and making choices

If a person has difficulty choosing what they want to make their video about or what might come next in the sequence of an activity, it can be helpful to write down the options. Keep the choices restricted to 2-3 to avoid overwhelming the person. You could ask the person to number the options in order of what they would like to focus on or put numbers next to the words to say what the order is of an activity. For example, you could say: "I am going to write down some things you could make a video about. Put a number 1 next to the most important thing to you. Put number 2 beside the next most important."

If the person still finds this difficult, explore the potential reasons for choosing each option. You may need to offer some suggestions about why something may be a priority and see if the person agrees.

An example might be:



"Transferring from the bed to your chair is something that happens every day. Going on holidays happens once a year. Which one do you think is more important to talk about in the first video?"

For a person who has very little communication, you may need to give them choices and ask them to say 'yes' or 'no'. Sometimes a person will not be able to make choices and, if this is the case, trusted people and professionals may be consulted on what to make a video about. Always run the ideas past the person and get their permission to go ahead.

## Support for memory

- Use existing memory supports - for example, pictures or written explanations of support needs.
- Ask permission to include your or someone else's knowledge of a situation.  
For example:



"Is this tricky for you to remember? (Pause for response) "Is it ok if I fill in some gaps?"  
Or "could we ask your physio about this?"

- Know how a person remembers better. If repetition works, repeat important concepts or ask the person to tell you what has already been decided or covered. If a person needs a written summary, make sure you write down the key points in the conversation and refer to it in later sessions.

## Support for impulse control

Sometimes people can make up their mind quickly without thinking through all the information to make a good decision. It is important to remain respectful and maintain trust with the person, while offering an alternative way to think about something. An example might be a person who wants to tell their support worker that they can do their own grocery shopping, despite you knowing that the person has difficulty moving around the shops without bumping into things and managing money.

One way to explore this could be:

1. Acknowledge the meaning behind what the person said.  
"You can do lots of the grocery shopping without help, right?"
2. Ask a curious question to give space for more thinking time. "I'm wondering about how sometimes you may not see something and run into it." (Pause)  
"Or how it can be tricky to get your money right at the checkout sometimes."
3. Ask for the person to reflect on challenging issues to build importance of negotiating a solution. "How does it feel when you run into things or have trouble with money?"... "Is it helpful to have someone around to give you a hand if you need it?"



## Supporting a person to come up with ideas

- Always give lots of extra time before you offer suggestions - some people need longer to think about things or to plan what they are going to say.

- Ask permission to offer some ideas:



"I have some ideas, tell me if you like any of these..."

- Build on your shared experience with the person:



"When we have done \_\_\_\_\_ together, I've noticed that you liked \_\_\_\_\_. Should we include that?"

## Support for people who have trouble controlling their behaviour

Some people have difficulty controlling what they say or do. This can interrupt the flow of conversation and make it difficult to make the video. Examples of issues a person may have are:

- Anger outbursts or swearing/being abusive
- Being sexually inappropriate
- Difficulty controlling other emotions, such as laughing or crying

Consult any existing behaviour management plans that have been developed with the person's support team and follow recommendations. Have a conversation with the person about how you would like to manage known behaviours during the video-making process. Get the person's permission to use particular strategies.