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**Top tips for communicating with people with learning disabilities (LD)**

Sharon Rodrigues  
ALD Patient Information Lead

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**Facts**

 About 1 million people have learning disabilities. (Public Health England 2017). 21% are known to LD services  
 Only 5-10% of people with learning disabilities have recognised literacy skills  
 About 20% of people with learning disabilities also have some degree of visual impairment.  
 40% of people with learning disabilities have hearing loss.  
 4 in 10 adults cannot understand health information  
 Poor understanding is linked to reduced life expectancy.

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**Levels of Learning Disability**



Level	Percentage
mild	85
moderate	10
severe	3
profound	2

**A person with a learning disability will have an IQ < 70**

**The level of Learning Disability will determine the method of communication**

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**Barriers to understanding written information**

 Most people with learning disabilities have very poor literacy skills and struggle to understand information in written form. They also find it difficult to retain information.

 In general we use difficult words and long sentences.

 People with learning disabilities find it easier to remember things they have seen rather than read.

 Having learning disabilities can affect the way a person understands information and how they communicate and behave.

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**Possible indicators someone may have a Learning Disability**



- ❖ difficulty following instructions
- ❖ difficulty in processing information
- ❖ not able to cope with more than one thing at a time
- ❖ difficulty in understanding abstract concepts eg time and distance
- ❖ confusion about times of appointments
- ❖ problems with planning and sequences

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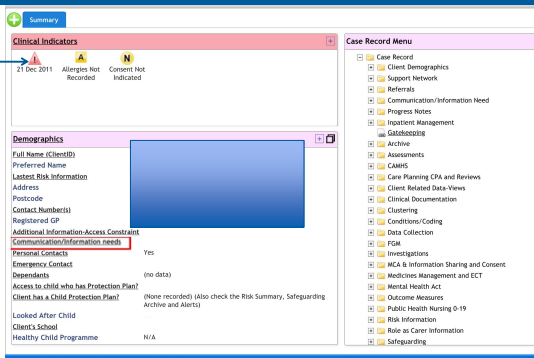
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**1. Find out how they communicate - AIS**

**Alert on RiO** → 

The screenshot shows the RiO AIS interface. On the left, there's a 'Clinical Indicators' section with a red alert icon and a date '21 Dec 2011'. Below it, the 'Demographics' section is visible, showing fields like Full Name, Preferred Name, Lastest Risk Information, Address, Postcode, Contact Number(s), Registered GP, and Additional Information-Access Constraints. The 'Case Record Menu' on the right lists various categories like Case Record, Client Demographics, Support Network, Referrals, Communications/Information Need, Progress Notes, Inpatient Management, and Assessment. The 'Communication/Information Needs' section is highlighted in red.

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Client Name: TEST, S, Saf - 2108674

Date & Time of Assessment: [Please Select]

Does the client have a disability as defined in the Equality Act? ☒ Yes

1. Does the client have any information and communication needs? ☒ Yes

2. What are the client's primary communication needs/difficulties? [Difficulty using speech appropriately]

3. How does the client prefer to be contacted? [Requires contact by letter]

4. How does the client prefer to be contacted? [Hearing aid induction loop]

5. Does the client require professional communication which method of professional communication is required? [Speech or signing interpreter]

Reasonable adjustments: [List the reasonable adjustments to be put in place eg appointment letters to be sent in easy read format, all letters and written communication to be sent in font 24. Please also include these in the client's care plan if relevant.]

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Alert on the demographics page

Summary

Clinical Indicators

Demographics

Full Name: Client(s)

Preferred Name

Address

Postcode

Contact Number(s)

Registered GP

Additional Information Access Constraints

Communication Information needs: Yes

Personal Contacts

Emergency Contact

Dependents

Access to Child who has Protection Plan? (Client has a Child Protection Plan? (please record) (also check the Risk Summary, Safeguarding Archive and Alerts))

Looked After Child

Client's School

Healthy Child Programme

Case Record Menu

Case Record

Client Demographics

Support Network

Referrals

Communication/Information Need

Progress Notes

Incident Management

Giftedness

Assessments

CAMS

Care Planning CMA and Reviews

Client Related Data Views

Clinical Documentation

Charging

Conditions Coding

Data Collection

FLSA

Investigations

MCA & Information Sharing and Consent

Medicines Management and ECT

Mental Health Act

Substance Resources

Public Health Nursing in 19

Risk Information

Role as Case Information

Safeguarding

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Find out what they need to communicate

communication passport

iPad

black book

hospital passport

Oxleas favourites - Interpreting Services

Need for information in Braille

Or uses signing to communicate


BSL and use of interpreters

advocates

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## 2. Be flexible



- People with LD need plenty of time to speak for themselves as well as understand what you are telling them
- ✓ Offer and encourage the use of double appointments

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## 3. Check the best time/location for them



- People with LD may find crowds, small spaces or long waiting times difficult
- ✓ Book an appointment at a time that is easier for them or fast track them. Find a quiet room to meet
- ✓ Send an easy read appointment letter  
Found in Oxleas favourites – Easy read letters  
<https://www.easyreadappointmentletter.co.uk/oxleas-letter>

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## 4. Explain what will happen at each stage



- People with LD may not understand the purpose of the visit or the process
- ✓ Explain the reason for the visit and what will happen next.
- ✓ Use visuals to explain what will happen next

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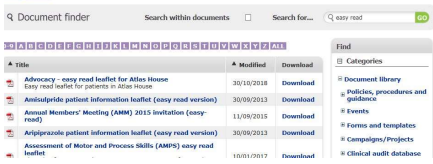
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### 5. Use easy read information

- People with LD have difficulty with literacy and may have visual impairment.
- ✓ Find out if the person needs information in easy read. This information can be accessed via the intranet.
- ✓ Offer large print if they have a visual impairment



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### 6. Avoid jargon or long sentences

- People with LD are unable to understand complex language or medical words
- ✓ Keep sentences short using simple words. One idea per sentence. Avoid 'and' and 'but'. The fewer the better! Use bullet points to simplify lists

**Assessment** Finding out about you

**Treatment** Help you to get better

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### 7. Speak to the person you are treating



- People with LD need to feel valued
- ✓ Speak to the person and make eye contact. If needed sit by them.
- ✓ Speak to the carer only if they are finding it difficult to understand.

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**8. Check your answers by asking in a different way**

point to where the pain is

Many people with LD will say 'yes' to a closed question

Try asking open ended questions or change the format of the question to see if you get a different answer



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**9. Check what support they have or what support is available**

People with LD will need support to take medication, monitor side effects or change the way they live

Check if the carer or support worker can be there for the appointment. If they have a black book encourage them to bring it to the appointment.

Easy read information on anti psychotics can be found in the Document library by typing 'easy read' in the search box. As well as easy read crisis plans and care plans.



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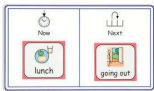
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**10. Use of a storyboard to explain an assessment**

People with LD find it difficult to remember a sequence of events

Use photos to produce a storyboard and if the person is autistic just use two photos to explain what will happen **now** and then **next**.



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Further support

- Easy read training available contact me  
[Sharon.Rodrigues@nhs.net](mailto:Sharon.Rodrigues@nhs.net)
- Easy read information available on the intranet  
<https://theox.oxleas.nhs.uk/document-library/>

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Thank you  
Any questions?



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