



Talking with Service Users About Coronavirus

Intro:

Service Users need to receive information about Coronavirus and have the opportunity to talk about it - just like staff, families and the general public.

Some adults with ID may not be able to access Coronavirus information from mainstream sources – TV, internet, radio. However, lots of people will 'pick up' that something is going on, for example, due to changes in their routines, changes in staff behaviour or identifying the naturally heightened sense of worry around them. It is important we respond to this in a way that is appropriate to each person. **It is important that we acknowledge what is going on.**

KEY FACTORS:

A. Service User's Understanding

Some individuals may have difficulty understanding what is Coronavirus and why their lives are suddenly restricted in so many ways. It may be difficult to explain to Service Users you support because they might have difficulty understanding:

- The information on the News
- They might not be able to read Easy Read Information about Coronavirus.
- They might not be able to find the words to ask questions about it.
- They might not have the opportunity to ask questions about it.
- They might have difficulty with sight and can't see the pictures used to help explain what is Coronavirus.
- They might have difficulty hearing the explanation that goes with the pictures.
- They might have difficulty understanding the words, signs and symbols about Coronavirus and the restrictions that follow.
- They might have difficulty listening, attending and processing the information.

B. Communication Environment

The person's communication environment is likely to have changed significantly in March 2020. In some cases, people are seeing their day service staff working in their residential house. Everyone in the house is at home all day. All of this has the potential to be confusing.

How these factors will impact?

These difficulties in understanding information and changes in the person's environment can lead to Service Users being upset, confused, displaying behaviours of distress and anxiety.



Some communication tips that may help

To be a successful communicator with people with a learning disability you need to be prepared to use all your communication tools.



Use the Easy Read documents prepared as tools to frame your discussion with the Service User. You know the Service User best and can adapt language to the needs of the person....

- You need to follow the lead of the person you are communicating with.
- You need to go at their pace.
- Choose somewhere quiet without distractions. If you are talking to a large group be aware that some people may find this difficult.
- Ask open questions i.e. Questions that don't have a simple yes or no answer.
- Check with the person that you understand what they are saying.
- Give information in small amounts and check in again at a later time to see if the person has understood, wants to talk about it again or has any other questions.



Look at the current environment.

Staff could ask each other:

- Is the house busier than usual?
 - Is the house louder than usual?
- Does the person have the same opportunities to communicate?
- If not, can alternative ways and opportunities be created in a sustainable way – being mindful of the pressures in houses and on staff?
- Usually daily routines help a person to understand what's happening in their day; can there be a regular predictable routine set up?
- Are there visuals and or objects that can be used in the environment to help the Service User know what's happening next?
- Are the current choices for activities being made available to the Service User?



Remember that Easy Read may not always be the most appropriate format for the group of people you are supporting.

There are different ways a person may be asking questions or looking for reassurance. If they are looking for hugs or communicate through touch here are some ways you can communicate reassurance to the person while following strict hand hygiene protocols.

The aim of the following is to reduce the amount of contact with the least impact on the Service User.

- Redirect touch to a staff member's face by taking the person's hand and squeezing it gently, holding it, or patting it. Then directly washing hands as per protocol.
- Reassure the person by spending time with the person. Sit/stand to the side, or slightly behind (as per protocol).
- Avoid saying "No", to the SU or words they don't understand like "it's not allowed". Try using positive language like "I know you want to eat dinner with Pablo, we will walk together after dinner".
- Redirect hugs by giving high fives and directly washing hands.
- Use open sympathetic body language.
- Use open friendly facial expressions by smiling and showing that you are listening.

Clear communication is key.

If a person demonstrates a behaviour of distress it is important to remember this could be a communication that the Service User is not coping. This is a difficult time for everybody.

- Staff can support each other by:
 - Reflecting on what can be done differently for the person in order to alleviate some of the anxiety.
 - Everyone can support the person's understanding of the new routine by doing and saying the same thing, e.g. keeping mon-fri routine and a weekend routine.
- Use concrete cues to support the person's understanding of the new routine such as
 - setting the table for dinner time,
 - using TV programmes like Eastenders everyday to indicate a walk will be next.
 - Or use staff members work times to help with understanding of time e.g. "when Sally comes we'll make hot chocolate".

Please contact the Speech and Language Therapy Department for further support around communication.

The Speech & Language Therapy Department would like to thank Psychology and Infection Control Department for their input.