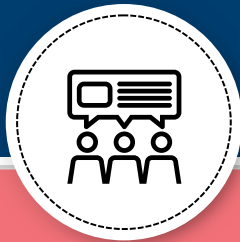


TIP SHEET FOR WORKING WITH CLIENTS WITH COGNITIVE DISABILITY



Build Trust & Respect



Communication Masterclass



Active Listening



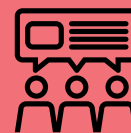
Client Control

Build Trust & Respect



- **Clarify your role:** Clearly explain who you are and what you do, and what you cannot do. Set clear boundaries and expectations upfront regarding your role versus other supports in the person's life.
- **Be reliable and accountable:** If you set an expectation (e.g., "I will call you on Friday"), follow through. Reliability builds the trust needed for effective advocacy.
- **Maintain contact:** Avoid long periods of silence. Check in via the person's preferred method (text, email, or phone) to provide updates and reduce uncertainty about progress.
- **Empower rights:** Provide your client with clear, simple information on their rights and responsibilities when engaging an advocate, including the steps for making a complaint if they are unhappy with the service.
- **Discuss triggers and support:** During your first meeting, ask two crucial questions:
 - a. What is the best way to support you? (How do they like to be supported?)
 - b. This process can be frustrating. What can we do if you feel upset or overwhelmed?
- **Centre the client:** Talk directly to your client and not to their supporter. If others direct questions or comments to you, redirect the conversation back to the client.
- **Be culturally sensitive:** Consider diverse cultural perspectives, especially regarding views on disability and family or kinship structures. Understanding these differences can be beneficial when working with diverse clients, as they may vary from your own ideas or cultural upbringing.

Communication Masterclass



- **Ask first:** Always ask your client, "How would you like to communicate?" e.g., in-person, phone, email.
- **Use plain language:** Convert complicated information into Plain English or Easy Read formats. Avoid jargon, sarcasm, euphemisms, or acronyms. If you must use a hard word, explain what it means using everyday language that is easy to understand.
- **Use concrete language:** Avoid using abstract language, use words that relate to things that you both can see, e.g,

Abstract (vague & conceptual)	Concrete (clear & observable)
We need to work on financial planning	We need to see how much money is in your bank account and how much your rent costs
The support staff need to understand boundaries	The support staff need to knock on your door and wait for you to say, 'Come in,' before coming into your room
You need to comply with your case plan to get your child back	To get your child back you will need to sign the paper that says you will go to parenting class and be on time for every visit
The AVO gives the protected person a safe space	The AVO says that you cannot go inside the building where they work, and you must stay at least 100 metres away from them. 100 metres is from here to that tree over there

- **Break it down:** Don't give too much information at once. Speak to one idea or topic at a time. Use "signposting" e.g., "Now we're moving on to talk about the meeting next week", when moving to the next topic.
- **Give extra time:** Schedule extra time for meetings and phone calls. Allow plenty of time for answers; silence is okay—you don't need to fill it.

Communication Masterclass



- **Repetition and documentation:** Go over things numerous times if needed. Write key information down in simple words for the person to take away and help them remember.
- **Check your own understanding:** If you, the advocate, haven't understood something, speak up! Chances are the client hasn't understood either.
- **Environment matters:** Try to avoid loud or noisy environments that can be distracting or overwhelming.

Active Listening and Effective Questioning



- **Listen actively:**
 - Show engagement with minimal encouragers, like "I see," or "Okay"
 - Use eye contact (if comfortable for the client)
 - Paraphrase or repeat back what the client has said to confirm you have understood correctly
 - Do not interrupt the client or finish their sentences for them.
- **Confirm understanding:** Check for understanding before moving to the next topic/issue, not just at the end. Use an open check-in like: "I want to make sure I've explained that clearly—can you tell me in your own words what we just decided?"
- **Use open questions** (The "How/What/Why" rule): Closed questions, answered with 'Yes' or 'No', can lead to a client with cognitive disability automatically saying 'Yes' even if it's incorrect or not a true reflection of how they feel. Use open questions that start with How, What, Where, Who, or When to get a more detailed and insightful answer.
- **One question at a time:** Ask one simple question at a time to avoid overwhelm.
- **Be aware of cues:** Notice both non-verbal cues (signs of confusion or distress) and your own non-verbal behaviour, e.g., looking at your phone, clicking a pen, looking frustrated.

Decision Making and Client Control



- **Involve the person in everything:** Include the person in all decisions, from big choices to small ones.
- **Gradual decisions:** Allow for gradual decision making where possible. Break options into smaller parts and discuss them one at a time.
- **Full range of choices:** Ensure the person has all the necessary information to make a decision, and where a range of choices exists, ensure they know about all of them.
- **Dignity of risk:** Respect the person's right to make choices that others might perceive as a mistake. Advocacy is about informed choice, not protection from all risks.
- **Plan for overwhelm:** Take breaks if the client becomes overwhelmed, upset, or frustrated.
- **Forewarn and prepare:** If the client must attend a formal event like court, provide an explanation of what will happen on the day, how long it might last, and call to remind them of the appointment, as they may forget.
- **Compassion and empathy:** Approach the work with genuine care. Use the person's name and actively work to make them feel comfortable and respected.
- **Manage transitions:** Give the person a warning if you are leaving your role or if there is a significant change in the support structure.
- **Follow through with actions:** Follow through on every action you promise to take and let the person know of any changes to the plan.



Please provide your feedback