



Tool 3.5: Communication with older people from a CaLD background

The following checklist highlights good cross-cultural communication practice for working with people from CaLD backgrounds:

- Keep in mind that limited proficiency in English:**
 - Does not reflect an individual’s level of intellectual functioning; and
 - Has no bearing on one’s ability to communicate in one’s language of origin, nor in one’s literacy in their own language of origin.
- Make the environment conducive to communication.** Avoid places with too much background noise, distractions, and where interruptions are likely.
- Have consideration for the individuality of the person.**
- Give the speaker plenty of time in which to communicate.** Having to hurry creates tension, which affects the way people speak.
- Listen.**
- Use only qualified language interpreters** when communicating with clients and their carers who lack adequate English communication skills. This is especially important in situations wherein the information discussed is critical to the well-being of the person.
- All information relating to key service delivery contexts (e.g., care plan and service agreement)** should be provided to the client and their advocate **in their own language.**
- Speak clearly but do not raise your voice.** Speaking loudly will not necessarily ensure that you will be understood.
- Speak slowly** throughout the conversation and **repeat** when you have not been understood or **ask the person to tell you what has been said** to confirm that they understand.
- Adapt the pace of the conversation** to fit the person’s ability to comprehend.
- Use words your listener is likely to know.** Avoid jargon and popular idioms or slang.
- Use the active rather than passive voice**, e.g., “We will give you breakfast at 7 o’clock”, not “Breakfast will be given to you at 7 o’clock”.
- Give instructions in clear, logical sentences and present one topic at a time.**
- Gauge** how much people are likely to remember.
- Body language can provide important clues** for increased understanding for the carer and the client. Use empathy. Use touch – if appropriate and acceptable – and validate the person’s thoughts and feelings.
- If required, learn and use key words in the person’s own language** to improve communication during routine care and other simple service interventions.
- Accept that it may be necessary to use alternative forms of communication** for some families, (e.g., verbal, as word of mouth may be a preferred method of receiving information).

- If required, use visual aids, gestures, and physical prompts.**
- Do not speak Pidgin English.** It is not easier to understand and can unintentionally sound condescending.
- Avoid jokes,** as these may not be understood by your listener. Irony, satire, and sarcasm should be avoided for the same reasons.
- Do not exclude the client from discussion** when relatives are present. It may be easier to talk to relatives, but it is important that the individual is heard.²¹

21 Adapted from the Multicultural Communities Council of SA Inc and Multicultural Aged Care Inc's *Working cross culturally guide*. <http://www.mac.org.au/docs/WCCGuide.pdf>