

Disability Resource Hub Disclaimer

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What am I communicating to you?

The 'What am I communicating to you?' chart helps us understand what the person is trying to tell us when their speech is unclear, or they don't use words to communicate so they communicate more clearly with their behaviour, or when what they say is not necessarily what they mean. The 'What am I Communicating to you?' chart should help any new person – staff or others – to get off to a good start with the person.

The chart is not just for people who don't use words to communicate, although they are certainly very powerful for these people. Many people who have been involved with services for a long time have learnt to say what they think people want to hear rather than what they really mean. Also, sometimes people say one thing, but mean something completely different – do you ever say 'I'm fine thanks', even when you're having a terrible day? When you do this other people in your life who know you well would pay attention to your non-verbal communication and understand that you are not okay.

Capturing how someone communicates and using this information also helps relieve the frustration felt by the person when they are not understood. It also makes it easier for new people in the person's life to get to know and understand them.

When the person has only a handful of ways of communicating to others, this may need to be recorded multiple times, using the first column to clarify how different situations or different times of day may change the meanings of the person's actions.

When people are struggling to understand how someone is communicating, referrals are often made to speech pathologists or behaviour clinicians. Staff can start to record what they know and act on it while they wait for the specialist support. This will ensure a wealth of information for the specialist to build on, and hopefully far less frustration for the person early on.

If people disagree about how or what the person is communicating, you can try testing out different theories and use learning logs or the 4 + 1 Questions to record what you learn.

This information was developed by Helen Sanderson Associates (Australia) in 2011, for Ageing Disability and Home Care, Department of Human Services NSW, as a resource to support the Lifestyle Planning Practice Guide and Tools. Most of these tools are Person Centred Thinking tools, and were either developed by The Learning Community for Person Centred Practices, or Helen Sanderson Associates. They are used here with permission. We would like to thank the residents, family members and staff for their time and support in developing examples.

These instructions are not intended as a substitute for training. If you are using these tools for the first time and have not attended a Person Centred Thinking course, please seek support from a colleague or manager who has attended training.



When this is happening (or just happened) does this	We think it means	And we should

What am I communicating to you?

tips

- 1 Start with what the person does, or what you think the person is trying to tell you, and then fill in the other columns.
- 2 Pay attention to recording detail as this could have a big role in whether people provide consistent responses to the person.
- 3 You could also use photos or video to capture this information, especially if what the person does is difficult to describe in words.



Eliza

Eliza is an extremely intelligent 10 year old girl with a wicked sense of humour and a strong passion for maths and socialising. She has a condition called Epidermalbulosa which means her skin blisters very easily which results in much scar tissue. In her case, all blisters need to be popped as soon as possible, as they will only grow larger and create increased pain and scar tissue. This effects all aspects of Eliza's life and has resulted in greatly reduced mobility. Eliza uses words to communicate however it helps to know more information around her communication so we don't rely on her words alone. (photo provided)



When this is happening (or just happened)	Eliza does this	We think it means	And we should
<p><i>Eliza is distracted from conversations, doesn't answer your questions and doesn't initiate conversation.</i></p>	<p><i>Says "no, I'm fine" very quickly if you ask her if she has a blister, then changes the conversation quickly.</i></p>	<p><i>Eliza has a blister or is unwell but she doesn't want to stop having fun to get it fixed.</i></p>	<p><i>Tell her you have something really exciting to talk about and you can do that while you check things out. Don't force her or get angry with her. She will let you know within the next 10 minutes if something is wrong.</i></p>

tips

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