

COMMUNICATING WITH SOMEONE WHO HAS A MODERATE TO SEVERE INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY

WHAT IS AN INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY?

Intellectual Disability (ID) is a term used to describe a person who has difficulties with cognitive functioning, including communication, social and self-care skills. These difficulties can range from being very subtle to more pronounced, depending on the severity of the ID.

Working with someone who has Intellectual difficulties may cause you to rethink the way you communicate. Remember that our communication is made up of the following:

- Body language = 55%
- Tone of voice = 38%
- Words = 7%

COMMUNICATION TIPS

When communicating with someone who has difficulty following instructions and/or expressing themselves, we need to really emphasise our body language and tone of voice. We can do this in the following ways:

- **Use simple and straightforward language.** Emphasise the **key words** and avoid complex sentences e.g. instead of saying “*Before we have lunch, lets go to the toilet*”, you could instead say “*First, go to the toilet. Then we will eat lunch.*”
- Use your hands as much as possible! **Pointing, gesture, actions and simple drawings** can all go a long way to help the person understand.
- Use your **facial expressions** to emphasise your message.
- If the person is non-verbal, **ensure you are interpreting their actions, sounds and movements as a means of communication.** Sometimes their ‘challenging’ behaviour may be a means of expressing a message.
- **Assistive devices** like communication boards can be used alongside speech. You can find examples of communication/letter boards on our website: nutricia.ie.
- **Phones/tablets may also be used as communication aids** e.g. download visual aid apps or simply take photographs of frequently used items which the person can refer to if they are having difficulty expressing themselves or being understood.
- Use daily visual boards as much as possible so the person knows what they are doing for the day.
- Some individuals may find it easier to understand when **real objects are used for reference.** For example, it may be better to show a person their football to show you are going to the park, instead of a photograph of the park.



Please visit isti.ie to locate a Speech and Language Therapist near you.

You can also visit nutricia.ie, email nutriciacare@nutricia.com or Freephone 1800 923 404 for more information.

