

Developmental Disability WA, Online Course:

Foundations to Understanding Behaviour

Module Three: Communication

Video Transcript

Communication is another very important factor in understanding behaviour. Communication is central to everything, to how we learn to how we understand and engage with the world, to how we have relationships, to our identity and how we are understood by others. Like relationships, communication has a very important role in how we develop and experience self-regulation. Communication is central to how we process information, express ourselves and meet our need for relationships. Without effective communication, we experienced significant levels of stress, which can lead to behaving in ways that can be challenging. Communication is complex and involves many skills. This can include how we understand information, how we express ourselves, how we interact, and how we connect. If you have a disability, meeting your needs in these areas might be tricky, or different. Often people with a disability will have complex communication needs. Can you imagine the daily stress, our body would experience without successful ways of processing information and interaction with others?

Difficulties with communication can significantly raise people's stress, which in turn makes understanding and interacting with our world, even more difficult. Imagine not having the words to express what you're thinking or experiencing or having challenges understanding information you need to learn. Imagine what it would feel like if your choices were controlled by everyone around you, or being in an environment where you do not have access to ways to learn to communicate, especially if speech is difficult for you. Imagine how frightening and stressful it would feel to not be able to say when something is wrong, or to see people assuming that you have nothing to say, just because you don't use verbal speech.

People with complex communication needs might not use verbal words to express themselves and interact. People who do interact using verbal communication can also have complex communication needs. They might have difficulty understanding, and processing language and information or might have difficulty expressing themselves when stressed. Do you find it more difficult to express yourself, the more stressed you are? Unfortunately, people with a disability, often live with high levels of stress. Can you imagine then how much harder communication would be?

People with disability can have varied ways of communicating with people close to them, speech is not the only way of communicating. You can learn a lot about how a person communicates just by spending some time with them and tuning in. It is important to focus on the range of ways a person is communicating, but it's also important to continuously support a person to develop new words, expressions and

meanings. We should never assume that we know what a person wants to say, if they don't have a way to say it.

Even when people have unique ways of communicating, they need continuous modeling and exposure to new ways to express themselves. Remember, we all learnt speech by being immersed in it all the time. This is no different for other forms of communication. Modeling language needs to be embedded in all of our interactions.

We need to support all people to have access to communication in lots of different ways, and at all times. For most people visual communication is easier to process, and provides access to what we might want to say. This is the case for all of us, not just people with a disability.

Visual Communication is not an intervention or a therapy. It's a natural part of interaction in all of our lives. We are actually reliant on visual forms of communication at all times to help make communication successful. People with a disability, are no different. They just might need visual communication to have a greater role in their lives.

Think about all the ways you use visual communication to understand and express information. The images, text, planners, visual media- you engage in this daily. Could you live without emojis to express what you're feeling and thinking. Think about verbal communication. Words come and go, in milliseconds. If you need time to process language and ideas, this can be really difficult.

We need to think about visual information as being more than just text and pictures. Visual information stays for a longer period of time, therefore it helps with processing of information. It helps make the information clear and linked.

We are surrounded with verbal language throughout our lives. We are not limited to the words we are exposed to, or the opportunities to access the right words, when we want them. So when we're using visual forms of communication, our needs are exactly the same. All people with complex communication needs, need a robust system of visual language to have access to language which helps the person and their communication partner, interact together to say what they want to say, when they want to say it.

When we don't have effective communication, we can express ourselves in ways that might concern others. Behaviour is communication. But often, the person is not in control, or even aware of what they are communicating. They might be expressing something, but not be aware of what their underlying need is, or what they are experiencing that has led to feeling that way.

Remember, behaviour is a sign of changes in regulation. That is, what we are experiencing. People need communication support to help them feel heard connected and in control.

End of transcript for module three.