UNITE: Overcoming barriers to communication and inclusion

Lesson 9: Everyone wants to communicate!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of lesson: 60 mins</th>
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<tr>
<td>Prior knowledge (what should the teacher have already covered)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The concept of positive and negative language</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The power of language on opinions and attitudes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resources required</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Board to record responses (concept map)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Action Plan chart</td>
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<td>• Workbook</td>
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Key Concepts

• Everyone communicates in range of ways for a variety of purposes.
• To include everybody in day to day activities, we need to find ways to positively communicate with the people we come in contact with. Every contact counts.
• People with disability may communicate in a variety of ways.
• Approaching and communicating with people with disability is essential to overcoming social barriers.

Learning outcomes

LO1: Students use problem solving skills to demonstrate ways to communicate with a range of different people.
LO2: Students examine and demonstrate effective communication techniques that can be used with a range of different people.

Australian Curriculum Links

HPE Subject Area Years 3 and 4
ACPPS037: Describe how respect, empathy and valuing diversity can positively influence relationships

General Capabilities by the end of year 4 (level 3)

**Personal and Social Capability**

**Understand relationships:** describe factors that contribute to positive relationships, including with people at school and in their community.

**Communicate effectively:** identify communication skills that enhance relationships for particular groups and purposes.

**Work collaboratively:** describe characteristics of cooperative behaviour and identify evidence of these in group activities.

**Ethical Understanding**

**Consider consequences:** examine the links between emotions, dispositions and intended and unintended consequences of their actions on others.

**Intercultural Understanding**

**Communicate across cultures:** recognise there are similarities and differences in the ways people communicate, both within and across cultural groups.

**Literacy**

**Use language to interact with others:** use pair, group and class discussions and informal debates as learning tools to explore ideas and relationships, test possibilities, compare solutions and to prepare for creating texts.

**Deliver presentations:** plan, research and deliver presentations on learning are topics selecting appropriate content and visual and multimodal elements to suit different audiences.

**Critical and Creative Thinking**

**Seek solutions and put ideas into action:** experiment with a range of options when seeking solutions and putting ideas into action.

Assessable moments: As students undertake the learning experiences described in the lesson, take note of a range of assessable moments to provide information about student achievement. Ongoing assessment will provide evidence of the extent to which students achieve the identified Australian Curriculum links. Assessable moments are linked to learning outcomes and are identified by the following identifier:

✅ LO (insert number)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Lesson plan: suggested sequence of learning experiences</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intro</td>
<td><strong>State the learning intention:</strong> In the last theme, Language, we looked at how language affects community perceptions and attitudes. Today, we are going to explore ways we can overcome barriers to communication with a range of people. We will discuss how we feel when we are not understood, or when it is difficult to understand what others trying to communicate. We will practice strategies to communicate with a range of people so that everyone is included in day to day activities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Body of lesson</td>
<td><strong>ACTIVITY 1: What is communication?</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>15 mins if only one activity is completed.</td>
<td><strong>Class discussion:</strong> What does it mean to communicate with someone? How is communication different from talking? Why do people communicate? How does communication impact on relationships with other people? Can we communicate when we are not speaking? How?</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Main points to highlight:</strong></td>
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<td>• Communication is 2 way – it involves giving and receiving. This means giving a message (thoughts and feelings), and receiving a message (understanding or acknowledging).</td>
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<td>• Talking to someone only becomes communication if the person you are talking to understands the message you are sending them.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• People communicate to express their thoughts, feelings and needs.</td>
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<td>• Non-verbal communication (facial expressions, body language) is very powerful in expressing feelings and attitudes.</td>
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<td>• To include everybody in day to day activities, we need to find ways to positively communicate with the people we come in contact with. Every contact counts.</td>
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<td>We all communicate our thoughts, feelings and needs in many ways. If we do not communicate with each other, then we are not creating an inclusive school environment, and people feel left out. Sometimes, communication is difficult. When this happens, we need to learn strategies to help us find ways communicate positively with everyone. This helps us make new friends and feel great.</td>
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<td><strong>Teacher's notes:</strong> you can choose one of the 2 activities that follow, or if time permits, do both activities.</td>
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<td><strong>Pairs activity number 1:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Communicating without words</strong></td>
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<td>Divide the students into pairs. Give one pair a sentence that they have to communicate to their partner or get them to make up their own sentence. They are not allowed to use words. Some examples include</td>
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<td>• I have a headache</td>
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<td>• I want to go outside</td>
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<td>• I would like a drink</td>
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<td>• I am having fun</td>
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<td>The other student has to guess what the student is trying to communicate. Ask some of the students to demonstrate to the rest of the class how they communicated their message.</td>
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<td><strong>Class discussion:</strong> How did this activity make you feel? Was it easy? What techniques did you use to communicate the instructions? How did you feel if you could not be understood? How did you feel if you couldn't understand the instructions given by your partner?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Main points to highlight:

- Sometimes it is difficult to communicate your thoughts or feelings, or to understand what someone else is trying to communicate to you.
- When someone does not understand what you are trying to tell them, it can cause feelings of frustration. Everyone has times throughout their lives when these feelings occur. Frustration can lead to disruptive behaviours when we feel our thoughts, feelings and needs are not understood. When this happens to someone else, we need to find different ways to communicate more positively with the person who is upset.
- Sometimes you need to find alternative ways to communicate when you cannot use words. For example: Through voice tones and pitches, facial expressions, body language, singing, touch.

The manner that we communicate our thoughts and feelings greatly influence the way the message is received. We all can detect harmful feelings.

AND / OR:

Pair’s activity number 2: Students are positioned back to back with a partner, one person facing the front of the classroom, one person facing the back of the classroom. The teacher holds up a card with a line drawing on it. The person facing the drawing describes the drawing to their partner who attempts to draw it. The time limit is 2 minutes.

Eg.

![Drawing Example]

Class discussion:
How did you this activity make you feel? Was it easy? What techniques did you use to communicate the instructions? How did you feel if you could not be understood? How did you feel if you couldn’t understand the instructions given by your partner?

Main points to highlight (same first 2 points as above):

- Sometimes it is difficult to communicate your thoughts or feelings, or to understand what someone else is trying to communicate to you.
- When someone does not understand what you are trying to tell them, it can cause feelings of frustration. Everyone has times throughout their lives when these feelings occur. Frustration can lead to disruptive behaviours when we feel our thoughts, feelings and needs are not understood. When this happens to someone else, we need to find different ways to communicate more positively with the person who is upset.

The manner that we communicate our thoughts and feelings greatly influence the way the message is received. We all can detect harmful feelings.

20 mins

**ACTIVITY 2: My Radar!**

[LO1] See handout for lesson 9. Record individual response then have a class
**discussion in response to the question:** What are ways we can communicate with a range of people with different communication needs? Students record responses on the activity sheet.

**Teacher's notes:** For information on communication strategies for a range of needs, see attached description.

**Use the following focus questions to elicit responses (reproduced on worksheet).**

1. **How can we communicate with someone who cannot see?** (words, touch, music, Braille)
2. **How can we communicate with someone who cannot hear?** (Maintain eye contact, slow speech down, use gestures, use visuals, use low tone, be patient)
3. **How can we communicate with someone who finds it difficult to use words?** (Be patient when language is slow, use pictures, use computer keyboard).
4. **How can you communicate with someone who is ignoring you?** (get eye contact, be clear and precise, be friendly, be patient, if needed, find someone who can help)
5. **How can we communicate with people from another culture who speak a different language?** (Pictures, signs, body language, language conversion aids – eg. Applications on technological equipment such as IPHones, IPads)
6. **What can you do if you do not understand what someone is trying to communicate to you?** (Be patient, paraphrase what you think they are saying, stay calm, keep trying, ask for help from someone who may able to assist)
7. **How can we communicate with someone who does not speak?** (Be patient, use friendly gestures, find out how they like to communicate and find ways to involve them in day to day activities)
8. **How can we communicate with someone who is getting upset or frustrated?** (Do not ignore them, be friendly, ask if there is anything you can do to help or find an adult who can help. Remember that we all feel frustrated when we think people do not hear or understand us. Do not make harsh judgements, show understanding)

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<th>20 mins</th>
<th><strong>ACTIVITY 3: Role plays: 2 way effective communication!</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>✓ <strong>LO2</strong> Students work threes. Each group is given a question to role play from activity 2. Do not share the question with any other group. Write a short script demonstrating positive communication strategies. Present your role play to the class.</td>
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At the end of each role play, ask the class to identify and describe the situation that the group was required to role play. Ask if there are any further ideas that the group could have incorporated into their role play to make communication more effective and positive.

Role plays should focus on the following key elements: showing respect, demonstrating understanding, being a problem solver, not giving up, being patient, being friendly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Conclusion and reflection</strong></th>
<th><strong>Check for understanding</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>✓ <strong>LO1, LO2</strong> Get the students to complete their entry for the Action Plan for the U: Unite theme. Also complete the class entry for the Action Plan chart.</td>
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<td>Additional Activities</td>
<td><strong>Additional activity: Memory Game</strong></td>
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<td>4 minutes</td>
<td>The activity is designed to emphasise what it is like when too many things are happening at once – can be experienced by people with an <strong>acquired brain injury</strong>.</td>
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<td>In pairs, get one student to read out 10 words they have written down. At the same time, their partner counts backwards from 30. When the list has been read out, the student who was counting back tries to recite the list of 10 words back to their partner.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher’s notes</th>
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<td>How can we communicate with someone who cannot see?</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>How can we communicate with someone who is getting upset or frustrated?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>How can we communicate with someone who does not speak?</td>
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Communication Strategies

1. Cognitive Impairment
   (including Intellectual Disability, Acquired Brain Injury and Learning Disability)

A cognitive impairment is a disability which affects a person’s ability to process information. It may be due to an intellectual disability which a person was born with (such as Down syndrome or Fragile X), or it may be due to an injury to the brain later in life (such as an accident or stroke). People with cognitive impairment vary greatly in their abilities, so always respond to the individual’s needs rather than making assumptions about their ability.

Communicating with people who have a cognitive impairment

- Speak directly to the person with the disability, not to the person who is assisting him or her.
- Be patient. Do not complete sentences for the person.
- Talk to the person using an age-appropriate tone of voice.
- Make instructions clear and brief and don’t get frustrated if you have to repeat yourself.
- Use plain English and allow the person time to think and respond.
- Don’t be afraid to ask the person to repeat something if you don’t understand.
- Pay attention, particularly if the person has a speech impairment.
- Sometimes it can be helpful to write information down or to use pictures for people who have difficulty with memory.

(Source: Maroondah City Council 2011, “Communicating with people with a disability”)

People with a learning disability may have problems with speech.

Communicating with people who have speech difficulties

Remember, do not assume that a person with a disability has difficulty understanding speech as well.

- There is no need to raise your voice as people with a speech impairment may not also be deaf.
- Talk in a quiet environment if possible.
- Be patient, concentrate, and let the person finish what they want to say without trying to finish their sentences for them. This only slows down communication.
- Do not pretend to have understood the message. Either repeat back your understanding of the message for clarification, or ask the person to repeat themselves.
- If a person is using an electronic communication aid, stand in front of the person and refrain from reading over their shoulder as they type.
- Ask if there is someone close by who may be able to interpret for you.
- Acknowledge if you have not been successful despite all efforts and ask whether the message was urgent.

(Source: Maroondah City Council and MetroAccess 2011, “Communicating with people with a disability”)

Further information

Acquired Brain injury: www.brainlink.org.au
Down Syndrome: www.dsav.asn.au,
Fragile X: www.fragilex.org.au
Speech and communication: http://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au/

Dyslexia Australia can provide further information about the following: Perceptual difficulties or perceptual dyslexia, ADD or ADHD, Auditory processing disorder, Dyspraxia (balance), Dyscalculia (maths), Dysgraphia (hand writing), Non-specific learning disabilities.
2. Physical disability

The term ‘physical disability’ refers to many different sorts of permanent conditions which result in part of a person’s body not functioning as it should. Physical disability can be caused by damage to the spinal cord and nerves, limbs, brain or muscular systems. Physical disabilities can either be present from birth (congenital) or occur throughout a person’s life (acquired). Some of the most common physical disabilities include:

**Spinal cord Injuries:** this includes tetraplegia (where a person has lost some or all of the feeling in their arms and legs) or paraplegia (where a person has lost some or all of the feeling and movement in their legs).

**Cerebral Palsy:** is when the part of the brain that controls and coordinates the muscle movement, reflexes and posture is affected. People with cerebral palsy may or may not have learning and speech difficulties.

**Amputations:** the term amputee refers to someone who has a major joint or limb missing (ie. Someone with a part of a finger missing would not be considered an ‘amputee’). Amputations can be the result of an accident, a disease or failure of a foetus to develop fully during the first three months of the mother’s pregnancy.

(Source: The Whitehorse Disability Awareness kit)

**Communicating with people who have a physical disability**

- Always ask a person in a wheelchair if they need help before you offer assistance. It may not be needed or wanted.
- If a person is using a wheelchair, where possible, be seated so the person doesn’t have to look up. Communicate at eye level with the person.
- Speak directly to the person and not with the person who may be assisting them.
- Don’t shout. Deafness and physical disability are not related.
- Don’t pat a person on the head or shoulders or slap their back as a friendly gesture. This may be patronising to the person or may cause the person to lose their balance if they are using a mobility aid.
- Ensure that there is a clear pathway to intended destinations. At meetings or restaurants, make a chair-free space at the table for the person using the wheelchair to sit.
- When assisting in going up or down a kerb, ask the person if they prefer going backwards or forwards.
- Be prepared – learn the locations of ramps and accessible facilities.
- Avoid leaning, rocking or touching a wheelchair without permission.
- Never presume that a person who is non-verbal does not understand what you are saying. They may just require the assistance of a communication aid, for example a picture communication board or talking device.
- If children are curious, don’t discourage them from asking questions.
- Do not pat a guide or assistance dog as they are always in working mode when they are with their owner.

(Source: Maroondah City Council 2011, “Communicating with people with a disability”)

**Further information:**
3. Sensory disability (vision and hearing)

Vision: A vision disability occurs when there is impairment in the functioning of the eye. To get safely from place to place, people who have a vision disability have a number of options. They may use a guide dog, or learn to use a white cane, and learn to pay very close attention to environmental cues. Another option is to rely on another person to be his or her sighted guide. A sighted guide acts as a pair of eyes for someone who is blind, and it is their job to describe what is around and in front of them – as well as identify noises. Before screen readers and other computer assisted technologies, people who have a vision disability relied on Braille alphabet – a system of raised dots – to read by touch.

Communicating with people who have a vision disability

- When meeting, identify yourself and others with you. If chairing a meeting or gathering, ensure all in attendance introduce themselves i.e. conduct a ‘roll call’.
- When conversing in a group, address people by name.
- If you know the person’s name, address them directly so they realise they are being spoken to.
- Do not pat a guide dog when in harness as you may distract the dog from working.
- Be specific with verbal directions to places, and avoid comments like, “Over there….” Instead use left/right directions e.g. “on the right of the doorway”.
- Walk alongside and slightly ahead of the person. Don’t hold onto the person’s arm, but do allow them to take your arm if they need assistance.
- Tell the person you are approaching steps or stairs and whether you are going up or down. Provide the person the option of sighted guide or handrail. If the person prefers the handrail, the guide can place their hand on the rail – this then allows the person to locate the rail independently.
- If possible, offer the person a choice of using stairs, escalators or a lift. Avoid revolving doors.
- When seating a person who is blind or has low vision, the guide can place their hand on the back of the chair and the person can locate their seat independently.
- Direct the person who is blind or has low vision to their left or right, not yours.
- Don’t leave without saying that you are doing so, and do not leave a person who is blind or has low vision in an open area. When you leave, guide the person to a landmark, for example a reception desk, so they will then feel more secure and oriented to the surrounding environment.
- Do not leave doors ajar. Close them or open them fully. Always push chairs right in under the table.
- Do not relocate objects or furniture without telling the person who is blind or has low vision first.
- Offer assistance if it appears necessary, but pay attention to the person’s response – take your cues from him or her.
- Do not presume that the person can’t see anything. If appropriate, it is OK to ask what they can see.
- When preparing printed information for a person with low vision, it is best to seek their advice for their preferred format for personal documents. General information for people with low vision should be provided in Arial 18 point bold.
- The lighting needs of people with low vision differ and may be significant. Many people see much more with stronger light and others do not. The most common concern is glare.
- Do not respond to a question by nodding ‘yes’ or ‘no’, speak clearly and avoid using body language to convey a response.
- Feel free to use words such as “look” and “see” as they are part of everyone’s vocabulary.
Otherwise both you and the person who is blind or has low vision will feel awkward.  

- Don’t shout. Vision problems and hearing loss are not necessarily related impairments.  
- Ask a person who is blind or has low vision what they need and want. Above all, do not direct questions through their companion.  

(Source: Maroondah City Council and MetroAccess 2011, “Communicating with people with a disability”)

**Further Information:**  
Blind Citizens Australia: www.bca.org.au  
www.visionaustralia.org.au

**Hearing:** A hearing disability occurs when there is impairment in the functioning of the ear. For many people with hearing disabilities, the greatest difficulty is to use and understand speech. Even people with profound hearing loss may use speech to communicate – and the clarity of their speech often depends on when the hearing loss occurred in their life.

Communicating with people who have a hearing impairment:

- To gain the person’s attention, it may be appropriate to gently touch them on the arm or position yourself where they can see you.  
- Be sure to maintain eye contact.  
- Be aware of any visual distractions, such as glare from a window, large table decorations or inappropriate lighting.  
- Be aware that not everyone with a hearing loss can lip read.  
- If the person wishes to lip read, do not over exaggerate your lip movements, put your hand over your mouth, or turn your face away while speaking.  
- Be flexible. If something you say is not understood, then reword it instead of repeating it. Use notes or visual expressions/clues to illustrate what you are saying.  
- Where necessary, use a pad and pencil to communicate.  
- Reduce unnecessary background noise – this can interfere with hearing aids (if they are worn) and make communication difficult.  
- Do not shout.  
- Don’t refer to a person who is deaf or has a hearing impairment as ‘deaf/dumb’. Some people who are deaf or have a hearing impairment can speak; while others are ‘non-verbal’ and use sign language.  
- Relax and don’t be embarrassed if you say “Did you hear about…”  
- Use natural gestures in conversation as this aids in communication.  
- If there is an Auslan interpreter present, speak directly to the person who is deaf or hearing impaired - not the interpreter.  
- It must not be assumed nodding in response to a signed message necessarily signifies agreement. The nod may just indicate an understanding of the message received.  
- Allow the person who is deaf/ hearing impaired and the interpreter to find the best position for seating - this may involve rearranging chairs.  

(Source: Maroondah City Council and metroAccess 2011, “Communicating with people with a disability”)

**Further Information:**  
www.vicdeaf.com.au  
www.ableaustralia.org.au
4. Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)

Autism is a lifelong developmental disability.
A person with an Autism Spectrum Disorder has difficulties in some areas of their development, but other areas may be unaffected. The areas most affected are communication, social interaction and behaviour.

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) are classified as a group of conditions that vary on a continuum, also referred to as the “spectrum”. The word ‘spectrum’ is used as no two people with an Autism Spectrum Disorder are exactly alike.

Tips for communicating with a person with an Autism Spectrum Disorder:

- Be patient (interaction may take longer than expected).
- Give the person time to process what you are saying. Some people with an Autism Spectrum Disorder may take time to process information.
- Give instructions one part at a time, and allow short pauses between instructions. You may also like to offer to write down instructions.
- Do not force the person to make eye contact with you, and do not expect them to make eye contact continually.
- Some people with an Autism Spectrum Disorder have a particular strength in learning visually. It may help to use visual cues where possible, for example when saying "Please take a seat" point to the vacant seat.
- Minimise external distractions. If the area is busy or noisy, you may suggest moving to a quieter place where you can both concentrate more easily. Some people with an Autism Spectrum Disorder are sensitive to noise or find it hard to concentrate when there is a lot going on, and this can make them anxious, irritated or distracted.
- Use an age-appropriate tone of voice.
- Be aware that everyday sayings and phrases can be interpreted literally. For example, a person with an Autism Spectrum Disorder may not understand that ‘pull your socks up’ means that they are required to put more effort into a task.
- Irony, sarcasm and other indirect forms of communication should be used with caution as they may be misinterpreted.
- Try to avoid open-ended questions, as some people with an Autism Spectrum Disorder may be more comfortable giving short and direct responses.
- Be aware that some people with an Autism Spectrum Disorder may repeat words or phrases you say to them but this may not always be a reflection of their opinion, choice or understanding. This is known as echolalia.
- Do not be alarmed if the person makes unusual physical movements, for example hand flapping, or rocking back and forth.
- Ask the person if they would like information written down.
- Be prepared to communicate in a different way such as using visual materials.

(Source: Maroondah City Council and MetroAccess 2011, “Communicating with people with a disability”)

Further Information:

Subtypes of ASD include Asperger’s Syndrome and Pervasive Developmental Disorder-Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS). See the following website for information regarding these.

5. Psychological disability or mental health issue

One in five adults will experience a mental health issue at some stage in their life. Mental illness affects how people feel, think and perceive the world around them. This, in turn, affects their ability to carry out everyday functions, to work and study, and to relate to other people. Mental illnesses are often highly distressing for those affected and those close to them, but it is important to understand that they are treatable.

Mental health issues can include the following:

- depression
- anxiety
- bi-polar disorder
- eating disorders
- post-traumatic stress disorder
- obsessive compulsive disorder
- schizophrenia
- personality disorders

At different times, mental health issues can cause changes to a person’s thinking, perception, feeling and emotional state. These changes can lead to behaviours that are out of context and do not match the situation as you would expect. People living with mental health issues usually manage their symptoms with medication and support. Remember that social interaction can be difficult for a person experiencing an episode of mental illness. Be non-judgmental and allow time for interaction and decision making.

If you are interacting with a person and you notice that the individual:

- is disorientated, and responding to events and perceptions that you do not share (indicating that the person may have lost touch with reality)
- is becoming highly anxious and frightened to the extent that the belief of threat is governing their behaviour (indicating paranoia)
- is displaying unusual or inappropriate behaviour or emotion
- is speaking slowly or appears unfocussed (this is usually due to medication side effects or sleep disturbance).

Remain calm and follow these suggestions:

- Read the body language to assess the situation. Non-verbal communication can be very helpful in times of confusion.
- If showing signs of fear use non-threatening body language, quiet voice, reassuring.
- If showing signs of frustration, remain impassive (calm and unemotional)
- Use minimal verbal language (apply rule of 5 – ie no more than 5 words at a time – eg "wait", “let’s try again”, “It’s OK, we’ll sort it out”
- Calming body language – keep movements to a minimum. Give impression you’re solid.
- If intimidating, give space, don’t make eye contact (look at a point past their heads ), present non-threatening but assertive presence.
- Allow the person their space and initially avoid both direct eye contact and touching.
- Show understanding and compassion. Empathise with their feelings without necessarily agreeing with what is being said, for example, "I understand that you are feeling frightened by your experiences…”
- Ask how you can help. The person may ask you to sit with them, or to ring an emergency contact
number. Or they may just want to be left alone. Respect the person's situation and do not pressure them to take up your assistance.

- Don't take things personally. Remember that the individual may not have insight into their behaviour and its impact on other people.
- Use short, clear direct sentences to minimise confusion and keep your voice tone low and unhurried.
- Make an effort to talk to the individual again. Symptoms of a serious mental health issue are episodic and successfully managed with medication and support.
- See the person, not the symptoms of the illness.

Further Information:
www.sane.org.au
www.itsallright.org
www.headspace.org.au
www.beyondblue.org.au or www.youthbeyondblue.com

Further references for other impairments
Epilepsy: www.epilepsy.org.au
Developmental delay: www.rch.org.au/paed_handbook