

# Tips for Careworkers: People with Disability - Communication



**What it is:** Here, we mean talking with people with an intellectual or developmental disability or limited communication.

**Why it matters:** Many older people living with disability have multiple health conditions and can benefit greatly from the comfort, dignity, and quality-of-life focus that a palliative care approach provides.

Some people with a disability may move into residential aged care due to changes in their support circumstances, such as:

- ageing carers or the death of a family carer
- changes in care needs that can no longer be met through supported, independent, or community-based services
- limited access to appropriate local services or suitable accommodation

**What I need to know:** Older people with intellectual or developmental disability may:

- have individual communication needs that affect understanding, expression, or social interaction
- typically experience age-related changes earlier than the general population for some conditions
- have an increased risk of mental health conditions, and for some groups, cognitive changes such as dementia
- experience changes in hearing, vision, mobility, or stamina
- find that standard aged care services or activity programs may not always meet their needs.

**Do** Always give the person your full and complete attention and make sure that you have their attention before speaking.

**Do** Do not talk over the person as though they are not there.

**Do** Give clear and simple information. Use language that fits with the person's communication level. Look at the person not the disability.

**Do** Where appropriate a speech pathologist or disability support worker may have developed pictorial resources to support care conversations.

**Name:**

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## My reflections:

How confident am I in working with older adults with communication difficulties?

What can I do when speaking with a person with disability to help them understand what I am saying?

## My notes:

See related palliAGED Practice  
Tip Sheets:  
People with Specific Needs  
Person-Centred Care  
Talking about Dying

For references and the latest version of all Tip Sheets visit  
[palliaged.com.au/Practice-Centre/For-Careworkers](https://palliaged.com.au/Practice-Centre/For-Careworkers)