

Communicating with your client during COVID-19

HSC Health and Social Care

Wearing masks makes communication with clients more difficult

- They can't read your lips.
- They can't see your facial expression.
- They may not be able to hear you as clearly.
- They may be confused or anxious when they see you in a mask.



When a person is struggling to breathe, they may have difficulty speaking as well.

Some clients may have existing communication difficulties due to, for example, dementia, stroke, Parkinson's Disease, brain injury. This will make communication for them more challenging.

Communication barriers can affect the person's ability to completely understand what you are saying or take part in decisions about their care.

What can you do to help?

- Think about things from the client's perspective.
- How are you going to support them to understand you?
- Make sure the person has their glasses and hearing aid.
- Do you need any materials, eg pen and paper?
- Make use of any charts or communication support as needed.
- Check that you are in the best position to communicate (with the light on your face, not in shadow).
- Reduce background noise as much as possible. If your client is coughing, stop and wait until they have recovered.
- Approach the client from the front and keep at eye level.
- Keep body language positive and calm.
- Show your badge with your picture and name on it.
- Speak louder if necessary – but don't shout – and give time to reply.
- If you are expressing an emotion, remember tone of voice and to say what it is as they can't see your face, eg "I feel happy to hear you are feeling better".

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This document was developed by Speech and Language Therapists for care home staff to help communication with clients during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Published

21 May 2020

Last reviewed

02 July 2024

Additional information

This document was distributed to all care homes in Northern Ireland.

Details

Format

A4, 4 page booklet

Target group

Health professionals, care homes

Downloads

Attachment	Size
Communicating with your client May 2020	372.9 KB

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