

# STEP IT UP: Improve Your Communication With Neurodivergent Patients

## S

### Simple and Direct Questions

- Ask one question at a time
- Use simple terms and avoid jargon



## T

### Take Your Time

- Wait for an answer
- Allow an extra 10 minutes



## E

### Explain to Enable Compliance

- Provide a step-by-step explanation of a task and how it benefits the patient



## P

### Precise Language

- Avoid metaphors and euphemisms
- Say exactly what you mean and be descriptive



## I

### Include Carers

- Consider the carer's opinion when making a diagnosis
- Ask for their help with procedures
- Ask for a Hospital Passport



## T

### Touch and Feel First

- Allow the patient to hold and touch equipment before you use it on them
- Warn the patient about sensations



## U

### Understand My Differences

- Neurodivergent patients experience and express pain differently
- Don't assume that current behaviour is normal



## P

### Prepare a Low Sensory Environment

- Use a quiet, plain room with minimal staff
- Keep ear defenders nearby
- Contact the learning disability liaison nurse



An acronym to aid healthcare professionals when caring for patients with Autism and learning disabilities.  
For further explanation, advice and references please scan the QR code.

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## Some examples of reasonable adjustments are:

- Giving individuals an appointment at either the beginning or end of a clinic
- Involve carers but talk to the person
- Use clear words and pictures/symbols
- Give extra time for patients to understand information
- Don't assume that symptoms are part of the patients learning disability, mental health or autism need
- Adjusting procedures, e.g., meeting place and time to alternative venues rather than clinics such as schools, parks and open spaces
- Use of the discharge prompt to ensure patient and/or carers are fully informed
- Giving longer appointment times
- Placing an individual 1st on the theatre list
- Allowing a family member or carer/s to stay all the time
- Allow flexible visiting hours for carers / support workers
- Allowing individuals to wear their own clothes to theatre
- Doing other investigations whilst individuals are under anaesthetic
- Giving individuals a quiet place to wait away from the main waiting area
- Offering diversions
- Use of comforters
- Having one to one nursing
- Making information easier to understand
- Using a side room
- Allowing more time with meals/drinks etc
- Reduce distracting noise if possible
- Ensure lighting is not too bright or intrusive as this can be stressful for people with a learning disability

## What reasonable adjustments do people with a learning disability need?

Every person is different, so the adjustments people with a learning disability need will differ from person to person. However, there are common adjustments that help lots of people with a learning disability.

### Top 10 reasonable adjustments

1. **Speak clearly and use simple words.** understanding. It is really important not to make assumptions that someone has understood information they have been given.
2. **Take your time.** People with a learning disability may need a bit longer than other patients to be able to understand information they are given and to make themselves understood. Just ten extra minutes can make a big difference to many people.
3. **Work with supporters.** This could be a *support worker* or family member. Supporters can be really important, particularly for people with profound and multiple learning disability, but remember to talk to the person directly and support them to make decisions - supporters are there to help you do this!
4. **Be flexible with appointment times.** Many people with a learning disability will find it easier coming to hospital when it is quieter, so an appointment at the very beginning or very end of the day might make their appointment go more smoothly. They may also need an appointment at a time when their supporter is able to accompany them.
5. **Make sure people can get into and around the hospital.** This includes ensuring there are no physical barriers for people using wheelchairs or with mobility issues, but also making sure signs in the hospital are as easy to understand as possible.
6. **Provide a quiet place to wait.** Hospitals are often busy, noisy places and this can be overwhelming for many people with a learning disability. Having a quiet place to wait can prevent people getting anxious and having to leave the hospital. Many people also find waiting a long time very difficult.
7. **Listen to your learning disability liaison nurse.** Most hospitals have learning disability liaison nurses who know lots about reasonable adjustments and can help you to support your patient. Ask your learning disability nurse if you know you will be seeing a patient with a learning disability.
8. **Use hospital passports.** These are a patient-held, personalised record of what people with a learning disability have hospital passports and reading them will make your job a lot easier!
9. **Provide written information in Easy Read format.** This means people are much more likely to read and understand information about their appointments, procedures and results. This is also a requirement of the NHS's own *Accessible Information Standard*.
10. **Always ask the person what they need.** Reasonable adjustments are about what the person in front of you needs and they know that better than anyone. and any family or carers with them and do your best to provide the support they need.

We have created an Easy Read version of [the top 10 reasonable adjustments you can ask for](#).