

# Appendix 1: Practical Tips on Supporting People to Make Their Own Decisions

For a person to be able to make decisions for themselves they need to be provided with **relevant information**.

**You must be clear about what the decision is.**

**Here are some useful tips on how to support a person to make their own decision if there is no time limit.**

- Have the **correct information** and understand it yourself  
For some decisions, it may be important to get **information** from other people. This might be specialist advice, e.g. from a solicitor or a doctor. It might be advice from family or friends
- Take time to **explain** anything that might help the person make a decision
- Try not to give more **detail** than the person needs – this might confuse them. In some cases, a simple explanation will be enough. But you must not miss out important information
- What are **the risks and benefits**? Describe the consequences of making the decision, and of not making the decision
- Explain the **effects the decision might have** on the person and the people close to them
- If a person has a **choice**, present all of the options in a balanced way

## Remember

- Use **the most effective way of communicating with the person** – this might mean asking someone else to communicate with the person, or communicate with them at a certain time of day
- If you are speaking, **use simple language**. Where appropriate, use pictures, objects, symbols, illustrations or any other method that will help the person to understand

- Make sure you **consider how much and how quickly you speak**. Use words that you know that person can understand, and use short sentences. It may be useful to pause at times to check the person has understood, or to show clearly that this is the moment for them to make a choice
- **Break down information into smaller points** that are easy to understand – ‘bite-size’ chunks. Allow the person time to think about and understand each point before you continue. You may need to try on several occasions if there is a lot of information to consider and the person is not able to concentrate for longer periods of time
- **Repeat information** where it helps – be patient, always go at the person’s pace
- Think about whether to **involve others** – e.g. family/friends/nurse/communication therapist
- **Be aware of cultural factors** that may shape a person’s way of thinking, behaviour or communication e.g. their background, or their religious beliefs.
- Consider using a **professional language interpreter** if it will help
- Make sure any **pictures** you use to help understanding are relevant and the person can understand them easily – if a person needs glasses to see the pictures make sure they are wearing them!

The more a person understands the more likely they are to be able to make the decision.

### When supporting people with specific communication needs

You will find this information in their Communication Profile/Passport

- **Be aware of a person’s total communication** e.g. a person may say they really want to do something but show by their tearful behaviour that this isn’t the case
- If the person has a visual or hearing impairment, **use their preferred form of communication** e.g. visual aids, sign language, written communication, Braille. Use a qualified interpreter if this will help
- Are **devices** such as voice synthesisers, keyboards, or other computer equipment available to help – is the person familiar and comfortable with their use?

- For people who use non-verbal communication their **behaviour** (and in particular changes in behaviour) can help you understand how they are feeling – make sure you are aware of this and take the ‘whole picture’ into consideration
- Some people may simply prefer to use **non-verbal means of communication** and can communicate most effectively in writing or by using computers. Others may choose to communicate verbally but prefer to do so by telephone, or email, rather than face-to face
- Consider **seeking guidance and input from others**, for example, speech and language therapists, psychologists, interpreters etc

## Think about...

### 1. The location

- Wherever possible choose a location where the person feels most at ease
- Consider the benefits of making a decision in a relevant location. For instance, it may help a person to make a decision about a medical procedure if they visit the hospital to see what is involved
- Make sure the location is quiet and you are not interrupted
- Try to get rid of any background noise that may be distracting e.g. the television, radio or people talking nearby
- Choose a location where the person’s privacy and dignity can be properly respected
- Be sensitive to location e.g. it might be difficult to make a decision about where to live if the person is at the place they currently live, surrounded by their present supporters

### 2. Timing

- Know the time scale for the decision to be made in. If it is not urgent, this allows more time for the person to make the decision for themselves
- Try to choose a time of the day when the person is most alert
- If a decision is not urgent consider whether you can wait until a person’s capacity improves i.e. if they have recently suffered a bereavement it may not be the best time for them to make a major life-changing decision

## Hft Operational Standards: Making Decisions and Consent to Support (Appendix 1)

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- Some medication can affect a person's capacity, e.g. makes a person feel drowsy or affects their memory. Think about whether a decision can be delayed until the effects of the medication have decreased
- Present one decision at a time. Be careful to avoid making the person tired or confused
- Do not rush. Give the person as much time as they need, and the situation allows, to think things over and ask questions

### 3. Support

- Consider whether the person may benefit from having someone else there with them. This could be a relative or friend. Let the person guide you, both by what they say and what they do