


Guidelines for making information easy to read and understand for people with learning disabilities

5. Changing





*"I thought we
had solved this issue about
accessibility. John's complaint
clearly shows it hasn't filtered
down to all relevant staff."*

**Chief Executive, John's Local
Health Board**

Contents

	Page
Introduction	4
Making accessible information a priority	5
Chief executives	6
Team managers	8
Frontline workers	10
Managing the changes	12
Changing your thinking	12
Changing your policies	13
Changing your processes	14
Changing how you check	14
Changing how frontline staff give out information	15
Self-check sheet	17
Health settings checklist	18

5. Changing

Introduction

Becoming an accessible information organisation takes commitment at all levels within the organisation. It involves changing how you think. It may involve changing your policies and almost definitely involve changing your processes. It may, at least at the start, involve increasing your budget for communication.

This chapter will help you think through changes whether you are:

- a chief executive
- a manager
- a frontline worker

...and whether you work for:

- a large, multi-site organisation, such as NHS Wales, banks, national supermarket chains and local authorities
- an organisation with a communications department or officer, such as large voluntary organisations and larger private companies
- yourself or a small voluntary organisation or business.


5. Changing

Making accessible information a priority

If you are working or volunteering by yourself, or as part of a very small team, you will need to think of yourself as the chief executive, manager and frontline worker, all rolled into one.

If you work or volunteer in an organisation that has someone responsible for communication or information, make sure you use that person's skills (directly or via your line manager) to make sure you are producing accessible information, and that you are following a house style.

If you work or volunteer in a large multi-site organisation, it can be hard to be aware of what is happening in every part of the organisation. There is a danger that some sites or divisions may be unaware of policies about accessible information or even be unaware such a thing as 'accessible information' exists. They may produce information for the public without going through the communications division. They may be unaware of who within the organisation to contact about making information accessible. Here, it is vitally important that chief executives lead from the top and set a positive example.



"I thought we had solved this issue about accessibility. John's complaint clearly shows it hasn't filtered down to all relevant staff."

Chief Executive, John's Local Health Board

5. Changing

Chief executives

Have you ever asked yourself “*What would it take for my organisation to become a world leader at accessible information?*” Somewhere near the top of the list is “*It’s about hearts and minds*”. That’s why these guidelines come with a DVD with two short films where you can hear how Easy Read and inaccessible information is affecting people with learning disabilities in their daily lives.

Make sure you are getting feedback from a few people who use your organisation’s information. People will make initial judgments about your organisation based on the quality of your information. If you sell services, information is your shop window. If you provide a public service, accessible information will get your relationship with people using your services off to a good start. If people begin by expecting your organisation to be professional, accessible and understanding of their needs, they are more likely to work cooperatively and closely with your frontline workers.

It is also about being a leader and role model. By leading from the top, you set the expectations within your organisation. If you use a complicated style of writing, then others will assume that is what you expect from them. But if you get familiar with **SMOG** and **Flesch-Kincaid** readability statistics, you can set an example by ruthlessly editing your writing until it gets a suitable readability score. The next step would be using Everyday as your usual form of written communication.

It is about setting expectations that your organisation will, at the very least, comply with legislation about making information accessible. This includes making sure there is a realistic budget, adequate skills and knowledge, and suitable processes in place for producing, monitoring and evaluating any information you provide to the public. This can include practical steps such as re-setting (or asking your IT department to reset) the default for email and word processing templates to 1.5 line spacing, sans serif font (14 point for Word, 12 point for email) and wider margins. This means individuals still have the freedom to alter settings, but the more accessible option becomes the easier option.

If you work in a health setting, you may want to use the Health settings checklist on page 18 to check how accessible you are.

5. Changing

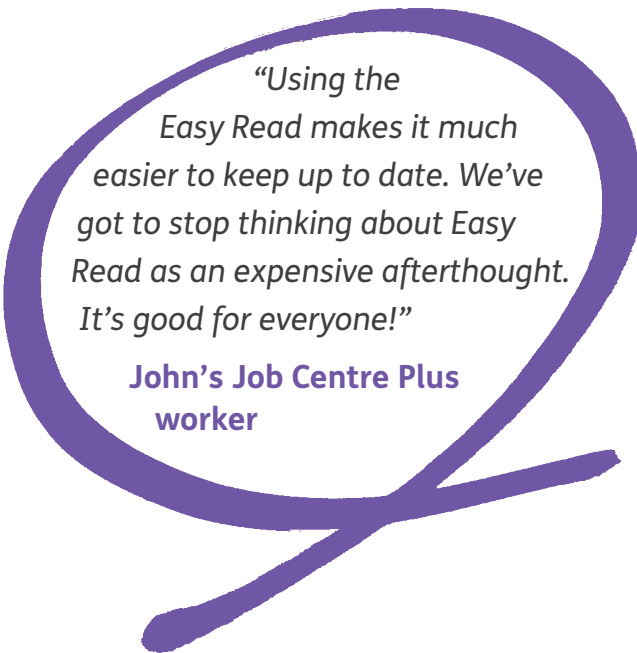
Here are some more suggestions to get you started:

- Re-read the steps in **Doing**. Check that your policies and processes reflect these essential steps. If you are working by yourself, some of these steps can be quite informal. If you are part of a multi-site organisation like the NHS, you may need more formal processes and a combination of local and centralised reader panels.
- Make sure all staff know about **SMOG** and **Flesch-Kincaid**, and know how to get a readability score for anything they write on a computer.
- Be sure all staff know they are expected to make information accessible to more people. You may want to include a box for readability score, along with date and author for internal reports.
- Make accessible information a priority, and give staff the support they need to make information more accessible.
- Make it a rule that any new leaflets or reports for the public need to have a readability score, a note of which style of writing has been used (Easy Read or Everyday) and be checked by members of the target group before they go for printing or are sent out. If your organisation has a central communications officer, team or department, anything that needs printing should also be seen by them. This makes sure that the organisation as a whole is working towards the same quality of information and accessibility.

5. Changing

Team managers

Today's manager often suffers from information overload. In part this is because of the pace of change. In part it is because of the style of writing. Always check for an Easy Read version for any new policies and consultations.



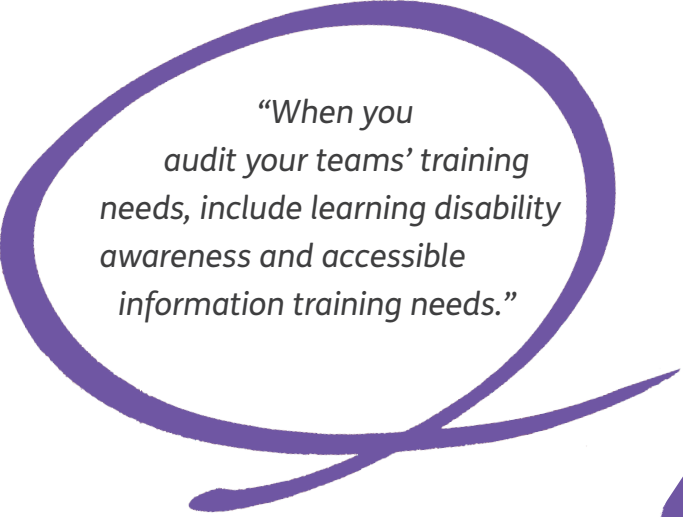
"Using the Easy Read makes it much easier to keep up to date. We've got to stop thinking about Easy Read as an expensive afterthought. It's good for everyone!"

**John's Job Centre Plus
worker**

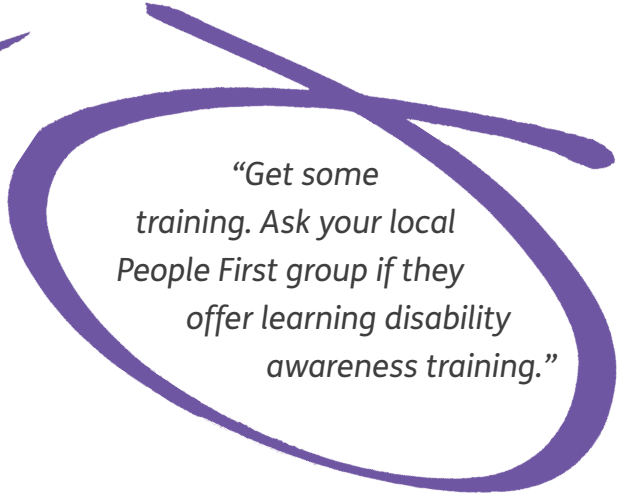
If you take accessible information seriously, your team are more likely to do the same.

- Read **Checking** and keep it in the back of your mind as you read and write.
- Use team meetings to check leaflets and letters that are being sent out.
- Find out how to use Readability on your computer, and make it your policy to check the statistics for everything you write.
- Practice a clear, easy writing style yourself.


5. Changing



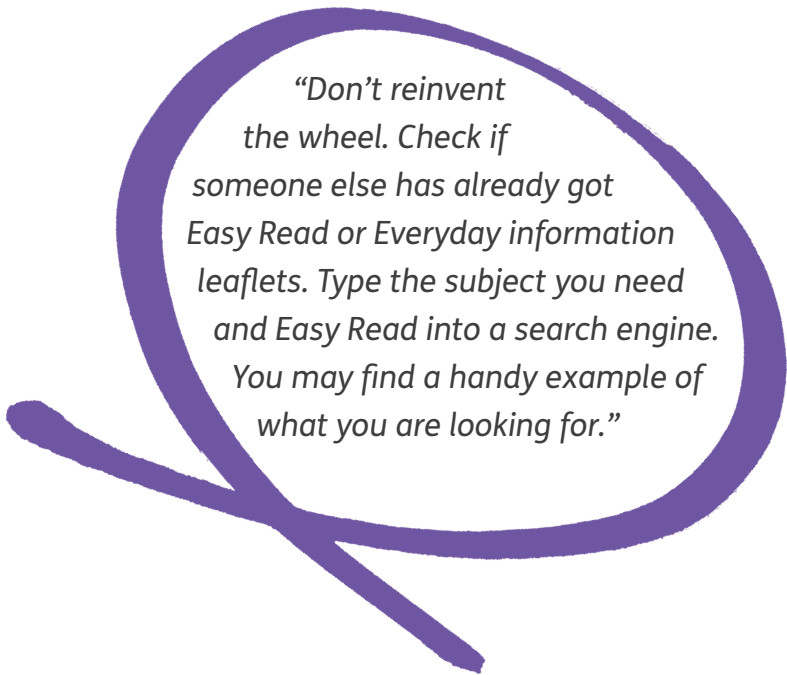
“When you audit your teams’ training needs, include learning disability awareness and accessible information training needs.”



“Get some training. Ask your local People First group if they offer learning disability awareness training.”



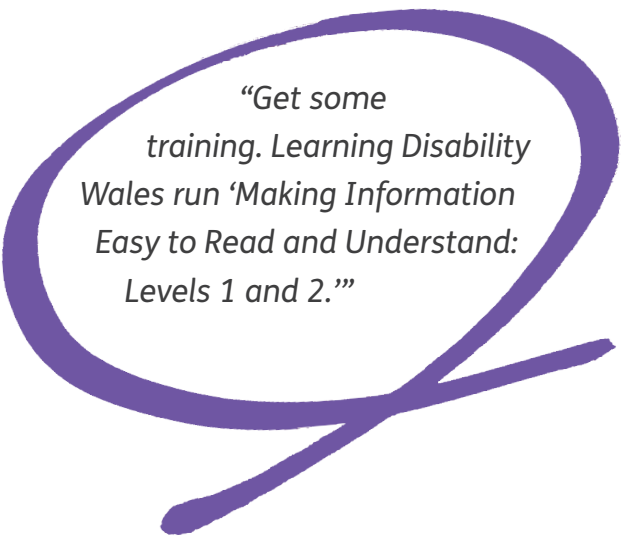
“Take advice early on. It will save you making expensive mistakes.”



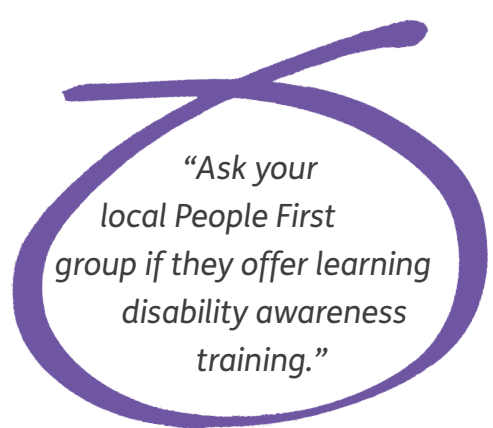
“Don’t reinvent the wheel. Check if someone else has already got Easy Read or Everyday information leaflets. Type the subject you need and Easy Read into a search engine. You may find a handy example of what you are looking for.”

5. Changing

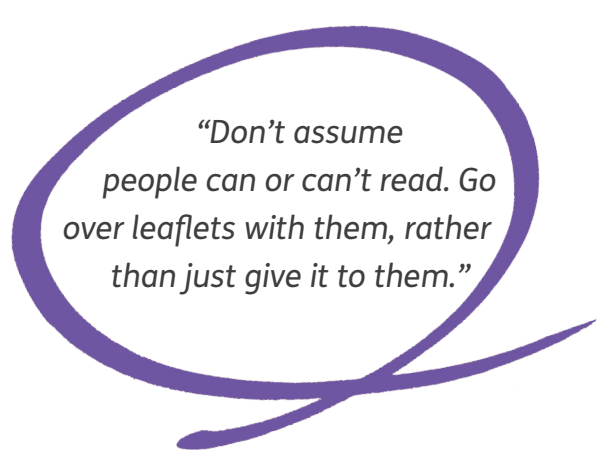
Frontline workers



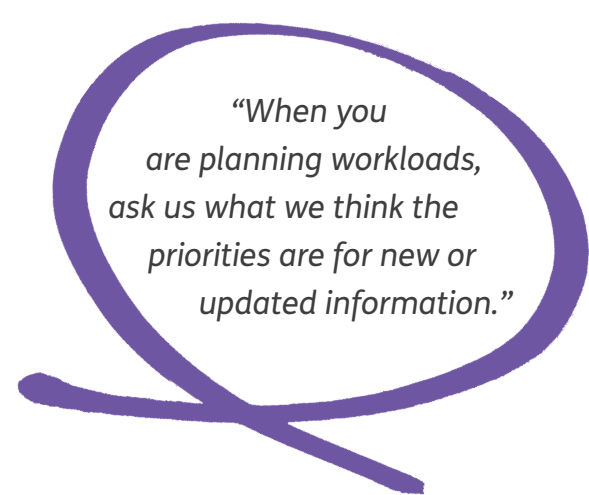
“Get some training. Learning Disability Wales run ‘Making Information Easy to Read and Understand: Levels 1 and 2.’”



“Ask your local People First group if they offer learning disability awareness training.”




“Don’t assume people can or can’t read. Go over leaflets with them, rather than just give it to them.”

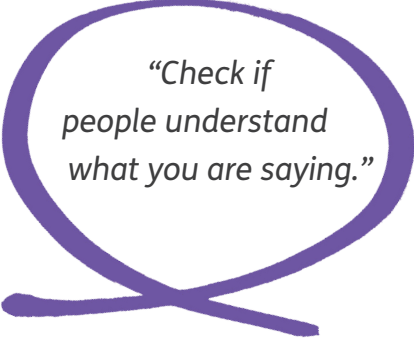


“When you are planning workloads, ask us what we think the priorities are for new or updated information.”


5. Changing



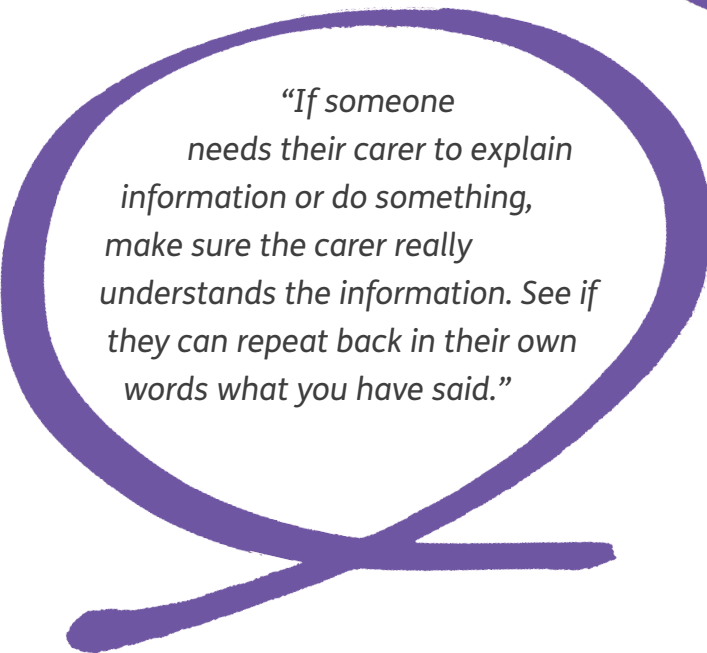
"Make space to stop and think how we set things out and give information to people."



"Check if people understand what you are saying."



"Make sure leaflets are up to date. It's embarrassing and can be dangerous if we give people out of date information."



"If someone needs their carer to explain information or do something, make sure the carer really understands the information. See if they can repeat back in their own words what you have said."

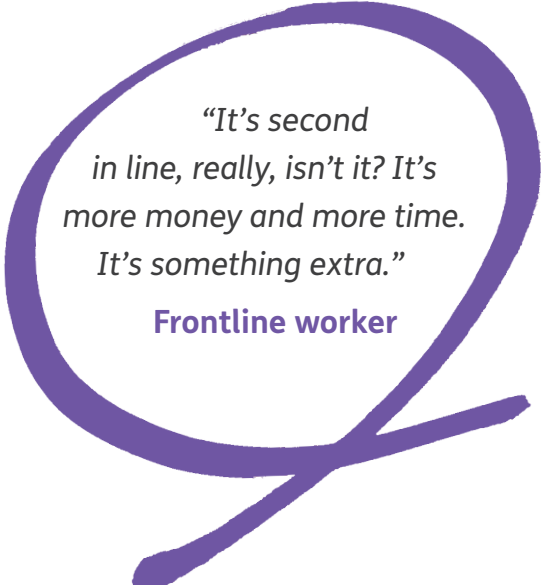
5. Changing

Managing the changes

Changing your thinking

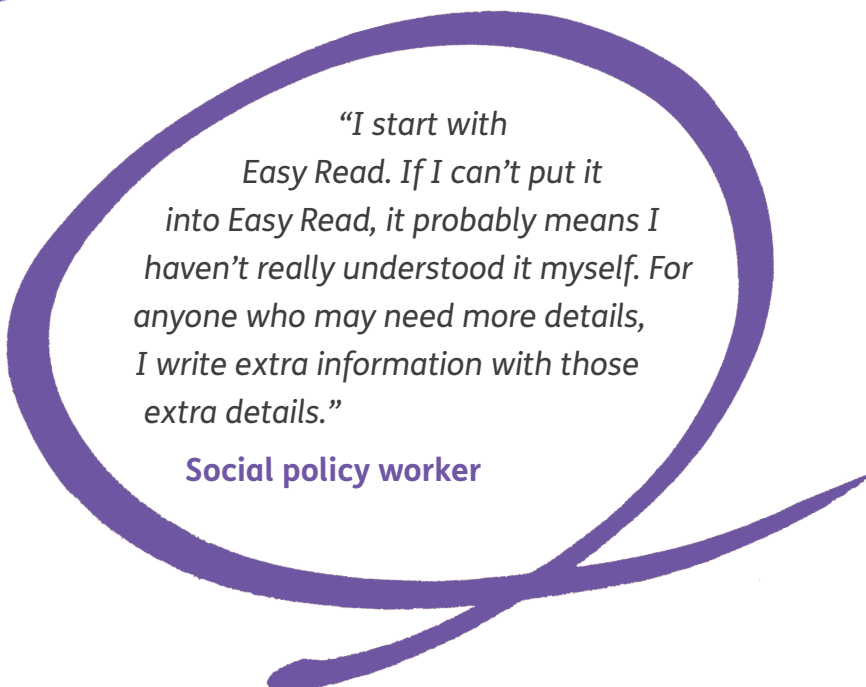
There are two ways of thinking about Easy Read and accessible information: an expensive add-on, or the first thing to be written.

It is not easy to switch to thinking the second way. That is why we have a whole chapter devoted to thinking about making organisational changes.



*"It's second
in line, really, isn't it? It's
more money and more time.
It's something extra."*

Frontline worker



*"I start with
Easy Read. If I can't put it
into Easy Read, it probably means I
haven't really understood it myself. For
anyone who may need more details,
I write extra information with those
extra details."*

Social policy worker

5. Changing


There are enormous benefits from making the Everyday style your organisation's everyday style of writing. There are fewer costly errors and misunderstandings when gobbledygook is replaced by Everyday writing. Staff will be able to read internal documents faster and with better understanding. People will be more willing to take part in your user groups, sit on your Boards and take part in your consultations. Using the Everyday style promotes inclusion.

Think 'Easy Read first'. If people need more detailed information, they can get it. But a well done Easy Read leaflet or document gives everyone the same starting information.

Changing your policies

A basic internet search shows that an increasing number of organisations have an accessible information policy. This is unsurprising given the business case and legal requirements for providing information that everyone can understand.

However, having a policy does not mean it is being put into practice. The written policies themselves generally use inaccessible language. The SMOG calculator showed that a selection of accessible information policies available online scored between 18 and 21. The target score for Everyday style of writing is 14 or under.



"John's complaint to his bank manager was forwarded to me. I went back and checked our policy on accessible information. I had trouble understanding it, so no wonder John's branch isn't putting it into practice."

**Manager of the Communications
Department, John's bank**

5. Changing

Changing your processes

Re-read **Planning** in the light of your existing processes and procedures. This will help you work out any changes that need to be made in your processes.

It is important for organisations to have style guides that include a standard format for Everyday and a standard format for Easy Read. This helps people become familiar with your organisation's style. People find it easier to read information that is written in a familiar style. They also find it easier to pick out your information if they can spot the familiar design.

This may seem like bureaucratic overload. But good organisational processes are the only way to become an accessible information organisation.

Changing how you check

It is also important to have an agreed process for approving new documents. The approval process ideally covers how the document was produced (**Planning**) as well as whether the document complies with technical style guidelines (**Doing**).

Depending on the organisation, there may be a team, a single person or no-one with central responsibility for communication and information. It is easier if someone has central responsibility and can check information before it is made public. Knowing that your writing will be checked will encourage everyone who produces information to take accessibility seriously.

However, it can cause bottlenecks if all information has to go through one central point. A good policy may be for individuals to use a self-check sheet (see page 17) for information that will be printed off or photocopied within their team, and for the centralised person to check information that will be printed in bulk. Audits are a useful way to show that your organisation takes inclusion and accessible information seriously.

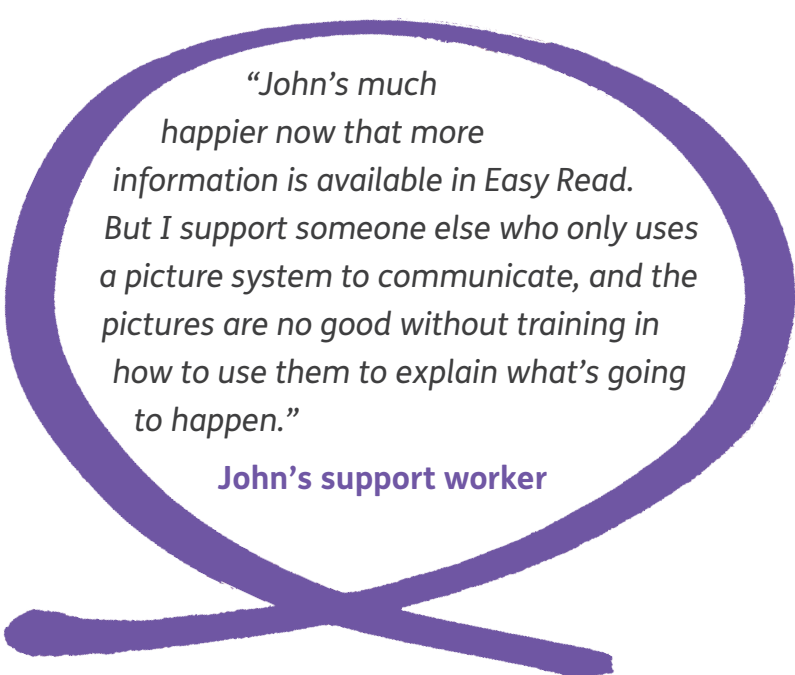
If there is no-one with central responsibility, it becomes even more important to carry out audits to check that public information complies with the Everyday guidelines.

5. Changing

Changing how frontline staff give out information

Having the right written information is a vital part of being an accessible information organisation. How you give out information is another vital part. Feedback from people with learning disabilities and their parents/carers suggests that there is a lot of work to be done in this area.

Front line staff and parents/carers may need support to know how to make best use of photos, picture systems, symbol systems or Easy Read to explain information.



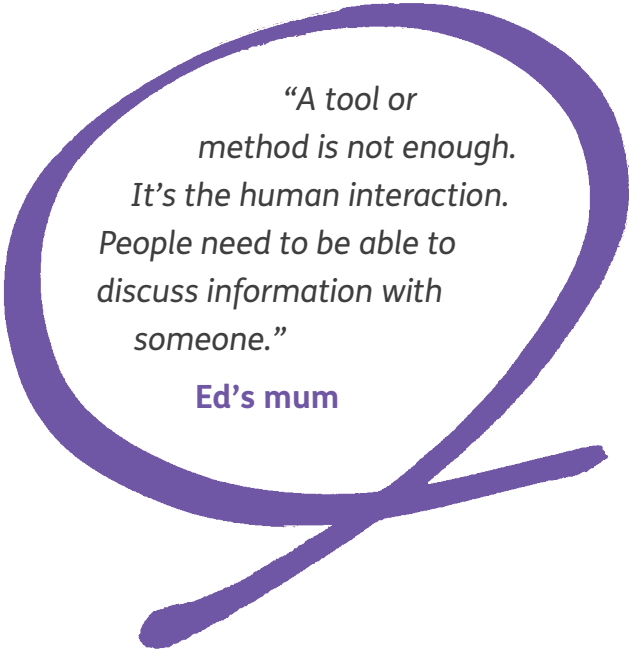
“John’s much happier now that more information is available in Easy Read. But I support someone else who only uses a picture system to communicate, and the pictures are no good without training in how to use them to explain what’s going to happen.”

John’s support worker

A simple technique is for staff to ‘check back’ with people, by asking the person to say what they think they have been told or read. Asking closed questions like ‘Do you understand?’ can make the person feel embarrassed if the answer is ‘No’. A person answering ‘Yes’ may be saying that because they think you expect them to understand, or because they think they understand. You have no way of checking if they share your understanding of the information you have given them.

5. Changing

Any organisation that takes accessible information seriously needs to consider how to train staff to provide information effectively. For example, talking and giving written information is more effective than either on its own. And it is more effective for a member of staff to go through a leaflet with someone than to talk to them and then give them the leaflet.



*"A tool or
method is not enough.
It's the human interaction.
People need to be able to
discuss information with
someone."*

Ed's mum

Self-check sheet

Who is it for?

Is this for the general public? Have I followed the Everyday style guidelines?

☐

Is this for people with learning disabilities? Have I followed the Easy Read style guidelines?

☐

Do any of the people getting this have individualised communication needs? If so, what have I done about meeting those needs?

☐

Have I chosen the best way to get the information to the people who need it?

☐

Content

Have I checked that the content is factually correct?

☐

Have I checked that I have included all the information the person needs?

☐

What score did the document get using the SMOG or Flesch-Kincaid test? Is the score appropriate?

☐

If it is in Easy Read, have I used the *Check It!* toolkit?

☐

Design

Have I followed house style guidelines?

☐

Are the graphics good quality?

☐

Do I have permission to use the graphics?

☐

Standard information

Have I included:

- who produced the information?
- the date?
- contact details?
- how to find out more?
- how to ask for an alternative format?
- organisation logo?

☐☐☐☐☐☐

Health settings checklist

The American Medical Association has produced a useful checklist for medical practices. The suggestion is that staff imagine they are the patient and answer the questions, to help them become more aware of some of the barriers that patients may face.

How will you be greeted by the front desk staff? ☐

What paperwork will the staff ask you to produce or complete? ☐

What rules and procedures will they ask you to follow? ☐

Will assistance be offered? If so, in a private, confidential manner? ☐

What kind of paperwork will you receive if you are referred for ancillary tests or consultations with other clinicians, and how will you find your way to those tests and consultations? ☐

Will you receive handouts and consent forms? If so, will you be able to understand them? ☐

Were directions to the office provided? ☐

When you made the appointment, did the person suggest that:

- You bring in any medicine you've been taking? ☐
- You bring in a list of your questions? ☐
- You are welcome to bring someone with you? ☐

Will you receive enough education to understand your own care? ☐

Will you get the same messages from everyone (physician, nurse, medical assistant)? ☐

Are all your interactions shame-free? ☐

Adapted from: Health Literacy: Help Your Patients Understand, Faculty Guide. American Medical Association Foundation and American Medical Association, 2006.

© Learning Disability Wales / Mencap Cymru / All Wales People First /
All Wales Forum of Parents and Carers 2012

For more copies of these guidelines contact Learning Disability Wales

Phone 029 2068 1160

Email enquiries@learningdisabilitywales.org.uk

Front cover photo: Inspired Services

