

Imagine yourself . . . mental illness stigma

Imagine going to the shop and never being able to find what you need, but the shop assistant insists on deciding what you will buy. When you get your purchase home it won't work and you become angry with yourself for buying it. So you go to a different shop, but you still can't find what you need - and the shop assistant there insists you buy something they think you need.

What would need to happen for you to feel understood?

Communication tips: mental illness



In general:

- Remember, emotions are like gatekeepers for information. The person won't hear your message unless they feel safe and can trust you.
- Be aware that trauma can sit behind apparently irrational or disengaged behaviour.
- Ensure a quiet, calm environment where possible to minimise stress.
- Try to assess the person's communication needs at the outset, and adjust your communication style accordingly.
- Check if the person needs a support person or companion with them.
- Speak to the person not their companion.
- Speak normally. Don't exaggerate your speech or movements.
- Introduce yourself by name.
- Address the person by name
- Be patient and give your undivided attention.
- Listen carefully and avoid assuming too much.
- Don't patronise or talk down to the person.
- Inform the person of what you are about to do; say why; and say what you need them to do for you.
- Stop and check comprehension from time to time.
- Be considerate of the extra time it might take for a person to do or say something.
- Relax. Anyone can make mistakes. Offer an apology if you feel you've caused embarrassment. Keep a sense of humour and be willing to communicate.

Specifically:

- Be aware that the person may have very different ways of coping with their illness and seem very sensitive or insensitive; hyperactive or lethargic.
- Ask the person what makes them comfortable and try to offer that.
- Keep the conversation focussed and relevant.
- Some people may have trouble picking up on social cues, so be clear and direct about what you are asking.