

# **Imagine yourself . . . intellectual disability**

Imagine you enter into a business meeting with serious looking people in suits around the table. The chairperson says, "Welcome to the convention of biotechnical engineering where we will analyse the mechanics of biometrical data from the cyclonic activity occurring in the infrastructure within the antidisestablishmentarianism group that monitors bioenvironmental activity". Then they look at you for acknowledgement that you understand what it's about.

**What would you need to happen so that you feel understood here?**



# Communication tips: Intellectual Disability

## 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:

- 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.
- Use short sentences.
- Use visual aids if necessary.
- Never pretend to understand what a person is saying, if you don't. Ask the person to repeat or rephrase, or offer them alternative means of communication, such as pen and paper, or an iPad.