Disability Induction Program

Course 3:
Essential skills

CONTACT DETAILS

National Disability Services is the Australian peak body for non-government disability services. Through the provision of information, representation and policy advice, promotes and advances services which support people with all forms of disability to participate in all domains of life.

carecareers is a not-for-profit employment initiative for the disability and community care sector. Its elements include a high-profile marketing campaign, a comprehensive sector-specific job website (www.carecareers.com.au) and a fully staffed Career Centre providing advice to jobseekers by phone and email.

Contents

Course 3: Essential skills

In this course, you will learn about the key skills you need and how you can continually learn and develop you skills when working in the disability sector.

The course contains two modules:

- Essential skills, module 1
- Essential skills, module 2.

Essential skills, module 1

Module introduction

In this module, you'll learn about:

- the importance of good communication
- essential communication skills
- meeting the communication needs of different people
- how to deal with complex and sensitive situations.

Sita discussing the importance of good communication at the country fair

Sita

Communication is essential for everyone. This module is all about effective communication, which is one of the most important skills you need in your work in the disability sector.

The importance of good communication

Good communication is crucial in supporting people with disability to express their wants and needs, in assisting them to achieve their goals and aspirations and to live in their community as they choose.

Some people with disability have no, or very limited speech and may find it difficult to communicate their basic needs, or understand straight forward questions or directions. Other people may also have a vision or hearing impairment.

Let's find out what Tony, Kim and Sarah think about the importance of workers in the sector establishing good communication.

Tony tells us what he thinks about the importance of good communication

"Good communication between workers and the people they are supporting is critical. If you have good communication skills it helps in developing a good relationship."

Kim, with her daughter Sarah, tells us what she thinks about the importance of good communication

"Our workers are lovely. They're friendly, compassionate and they speak directly to Sarah as an individual person. I think that is so important. They get to know her and her ways. As they get to know Sarah they also get to understand her speech as she can sometimes be a little difficult to understand."

What skills are essential when communicating with people with disability?

Tony, Kim and Sarah emphasised the importance of using good communication by workers in the disability sector. Let's look at the communication skills that will assist you when communicating with people with disability.

Interpersonal relationships

Communication skills are key when building good interpersonal relationships with people with disability and members of their support network, including their family and friends, colleagues and people in their wider community. These skills will also support you to develop effective relationships with the professionals you work with.

Observation

Good observation skills will assist you to understand what a person is feeling and thinking, and what they want to communicate about their wants and needs. This is particularly important when a person is unable to communicate verbally.

Listening and reflecting

Listen carefully to learn about a person's choices and preferences. Listening for the subtleties in a person's communication can make the difference between understanding and misunderstanding what someone wants to communicate. Allow time to reflect on the message and ensure you confirm that you have understood what they are saying.

Sensitivity

Be non-judgemental and respect a person's cultural, spiritual and lifestyle choices when communicating with them. Remember to address a person directly using respectful language.

Non-verbal communications

Body language, facial expressions, eye contact, and even your personal presentation and dress can reflect your attitude and feelings. These can have different meanings in different cultures.

Language

A person with disability, a family member, carer, or a worker can request to use language interpreters when they are needed. Increasingly people and families from different backgrounds are choosing workers who speak their own language to support them.

Auslan is a language used by the deaf community in Australia. Auslan interpreters or deaf relay interpreters can also be arranged to communicate with people who use sign language.

Use of assisted and alternative communication

When a person with disability has no, or limited speech, you can often enhance communication using images and symbols, or augmentative communication such as text-to-speech technology.

Documenting and sharing information

Sharing information ensures that everyone involved in working with a person with disability has a good understanding of how to provide the best support possible. Information needs to be documented accurately and objectively. A person with disability decides what information can be shared, and with whom. It is important that an individual's rights to privacy and confidentiality are maintained at all times.

Sita

Whatever technique or combination of techniques you are using to communicate with a person with disability, it's important you make sure you get confirmation from them that they have understood what you are

communicating. This might be verbal confirmation, if possible, or a gesture – like a nod or smile. It is important that you respect the person with disability's choices and seek their agreement, understanding or consent, whichever way is most appropriate.

Meeting the communication needs of different people

People with disability have different communication needs. It is important to use communication strategies to suit the individual. Let's meet two people with disability and see what their different communication needs are. Let's start with Greg.

Greg

Greg

Greg is 49 and works in a library. He is deaf. He communicates using Auslan. He books Auslan interpreters when he attends meetings with people who don't use Auslan. He also uses technology solutions such as a national internet relay service.

Activity

Imagine you are Greg's friend and want to get his attention and communicate with him. Which strategies could you use in this situation?

Select the five options you think are most appropriate for him.

a. Gain his attention with a gentle touch on the arm.
b. Maintain eye contact throughout the conversation.
c. Minimise background noise.
d. Observe signs such as body language as a means of communicating feelings.
e. Remove sensory distractions such as smells and bright lights.
f. Show him how to do something rather than instructing.
g. Use straightforward, concrete language.
h. Use your typical lip and facial movements when speaking.
i. Use gestures, visuals or write your message if necessary.

Feedback

The best five communication strategies to use with Greg are:

a. Gain his attention with a gentle touch on the arm.
b. Maintain eye contact throughout the conversation.
d. Observe signs such as body language as a means of communicating feelings.
h. Use your typical lip and facial movements when speaking.
i. Use gestures, visuals or write your message if necessary.

Sandy

Sandy

Sandy is 13 and has autism. She attends school and has a teacher's aide to assist in developing her social, communication and learning skills, and supporting her in different sensory environments at school. She also has assistance in developing skills to encourage independence in the wider community.

Activity

Imagine you are Sandy's support worker and want to get her attention and to communicate with her. Which strategies could you use?

Select the six options you think are most appropriate for her.

   a. Gain her attention with a gentle touch on the arm.
   b. Maintain eye contact throughout the conversation.
   c. Minimise background noise.
   d. Observe signs such as body language as a means of communicating feelings.
   e. Remove sensory distractions such as noise, smells and bright lights.
   f. Show her how to do something rather than instructing.
   g. Use straightforward, concrete language.
   h. Raise the level of your voice.

Feedback ✔

The best six communication strategies to use with Sandy are:

a. Gain her attention with a gentle touch on the arm.
b. Maintain eye contact throughout the conversation.
c. Minimise background noise.
d. Observe signs such as body language as a means of communicating feelings.
e. Remove sensory distractions such as noise, smells and bright lights.
g. Use straightforward, concrete language.

Dealing with sensitive or complex situations

So now you've seen some of the skills and strategies used to communicate effectively with people with disability while also meeting their individual needs. From time to time, you will need to apply these skills and a range of strategies when dealing with sensitive or complex situations. Here are some tips about how to do this:

Understand the situation

This involves:

- listening to what the person is saying
- demonstrating empathy for their situation.

Support a person with their concern

This involves supporting the person:

- to identify or define their concern
- to communicate the situation
- to identify a solution.

Follow up

This involves:

- letting the person know the process, supporting them through this process and keeping them informed of what is happening
- getting back to them with a response
- checking whether the person is satisfied with the outcome and maintaining confidentiality
- documenting the situation, including any interactions and outcomes.

Some examples

Let's look at three sensitive or complex situations. Think about how to use good communication skills and techniques when supporting people with disability to achieve the best possible outcome.

Three sensitive or complex situations: Karsha and her mother; Palak and his mother; and Cayman and Hans

Karsha

Karsha and her mother

The situation:

Karsha has been invited to her cousin's late night party on a boat where both boys and girls will be attending. Alcohol will also be available.

The issues:

Karsha wants to go but her mother says it's not appropriate.

Karsha has asked her support worker, Lily, to accompany her and convince her mother that it is suitable to attend, as she is 18 years of age.

Lily isn't sure if she wants to go as she's not keen on parties where there is alcohol.

Activity

What advice would you give Karsha's support worker, Lily, about appropriate communication strategies in this situation?

Select one or more option.

a. Tell Karsha you are unable to take her.
b. Identify any risks in Karsha attending.
c. Acknowledge that Karsha is an adult and able to make her own decisions.
d. Work with Karsha on how she can speak to her mum about what she would like to do.
e. Discuss the situation with Karsha's mother in private.

Feedback ✔

The best responses are:

     b. Identify any risks in Karsha attending.

     c. Acknowledge that Karsha is an adult and able to make her own decisions.

     d. Work with Karsha on how she can speak to her mum about what she would like to do.

It is best to identify any risks in Karsha attending, acknowledge that Karsha is an adult and able to make decisions like these, and work with Karsha on how she can speak to her mum about what she would like to do.

How did Lily resolve the situation?

Here Lily explains how she resolved the situation.

Understand the situation

"I listened to Karsha and put my personal concerns aside. I acknowledged that I understood the situation and explained to Karsha that I empathised both with her and her mum over this situation."

Support a person with their concern

"I supported Karsha to speak to her mum, and to manage the situation herself. Together we developed some communication strategies she could use. We looked at the risks in her going to the party and came up with ways they could be overcome. She was so nervous, so we role played talking to her mum. This included talking to her mum about being able to make decisions herself."

Follow up

"Karsha offered to ask another support worker to go with her to the party. I thanked her but insisted on going because I don't feel too strongly about it and I know it will help Karsha's mum feel more comfortable if I'm there. I called Karsha after she had spoken to her mum. She let me know that we were both going to the party."

Sita

The perspectives of Karsha and all the people in her support network need to be respected. Sensitive and open communication is required when balancing the person's choices with risks and the beliefs of those involved.

Palak

Palak and his mother

The situation:

Palak is a six year old boy with autism. He is spending the school break in a holiday program with his brother and other local children while his mum works. Palak's mother approaches his support worker. She is upset as she has overheard some mothers talking about Palak being aggressive towards one of the girls in the program.

The issues:

Palak's mum thinks the worker should be supporting Palak in playing with the other kids.

She feels annoyed that other mums are talking about an incident she knows nothing about.

She wonders why the support worker hasn't done anything about the situation.

How did Palak's disability support worker manage this situation with his mother?

Here the disability support worker explains how he managed this situation with Palak's mother.

Understand the situation

Disability support worker: "I can see that you are very upset. I didn't know this had happened. Do you know the circumstances around the incident?"

Mother: "Apparently, the children were playing ball sports on the court. Palak was playing with the basketball on his own and Suzie tried to use the ball too."

Support a person with their concern

Disability support worker: "As you know, Palak and Suzie usually play together well. Our approach to these situations generally involves reinforcing positive interactions between the children and role modelling how they can play and share together. But how would you like me to handle the situation?"

Mother: "I don't want to make a fuss. And I don't want the other mums knowing I'm upset. I just want Palak to have fun, get on with others and make some friends here."

Disability support worker: "Of course I won't let the other mums know you are upset. I'll ensure that all the staff are aware of how they can support Palak during playtime and we will encourage all the children to ask each other for permission when they want to use something that another person is already playing with. Do you think that will help?"

Mother: "Yes, I think so. Thank you."

Follow up

Disability support worker: "I'll keep a record of our conversation and how things go. I'll contact you at the end of the week and let you know how things have gone."

Sita

The worker was able to manage the situation using effective communications skills and strategies. She was able to turn the feedback into a positive outcome for Palak and his mother.

Activity

Can you identify the parts of the conversation where Palak's support worker used effective communication skills?

Read the following lines of dialogue, and select the communication skill the worker was using.

1. **"I can see you are very upset."**
   a. Demonstrating empathy for her situation.
   b. Maintaining confidentiality.
   c. Supporting Palak's mother in identifying her preferred solution.
   d. Documenting the situation, including interactions and the outcomes.
   e. Letting Palak's mother know the process.

2. **"How would you like me to handle the situation?"**
   a. Demonstrating empathy for her situation.
   b. Maintaining confidentiality.
   c. Supporting Palak's mother in identifying her preferred solution.
   d. Documenting the situation, including interactions and the outcomes.
   e. Letting Palak's mother know the process.

3. **"Our approach to these situations generally involves reinforcing positive interactions between the children and role modelling how they can play and share together."**
   a. Demonstrating empathy for her situation.
   b. Maintaining confidentiality.
   c. Supporting Palak's mother in identifying her preferred solution.
   d. Documenting the situation, including interactions and the outcomes.
   e. Letting Palak's mother know the process.

4. **"Of course I won't let the other mums know you are upset."**
   a. Demonstrating empathy for her situation.
   b. Maintaining confidentiality.
   c. Supporting Palak's mother in identifying her preferred solution.
   d. Documenting the situation, including interactions and the outcomes.
   e. Letting Palak's mother know the process.

5. **"I'll keep a record of our conversation and how things go."**
   a. Demonstrating empathy for her situation.
   b. Maintaining confidentiality.
   c. Supporting Palak's mother in identifying her preferred solution.
   d. Documenting the situation, including interactions and the outcomes.
   e. Letting Palak's mother know the process.

Feedback ✔

1. The best response is a. Demonstrating empathy for her situation.

2. The best response is a. Supporting Palak's mother in identifying her preferred solution.

3. The best response is e. Letting Palak's mother know the process.

4. The best response is b. Maintaining confidentiality.

5. The best response is b. Documenting the situation, including interactions and the outcomes.

Cayman

Hans and Cayman

The situation:

An employment consultant, Hans, is responsible for supporting young people with disability to become work ready and achieve their goals at work. Cayman has an intellectual disability and is one of the people Hans supports.

The issues:

About a month after starting her new job, Cayman's responsibilities were changed and they did not match what she felt she could do. She spoke to her supervisor but did not get an outcome she was happy with. Cayman is seeking support from her employment consultant around raising her concerns with her supervisor.

How did Hans manage this situation with Cayman?

Here, Hans explains how he managed the situation with Cayman.

Understand the situation

Cayman: "Hans, I liked my job when I started but now they have changed what I do and I don't like it."

Hans: "I'm sorry to hear that Cayman. Have you spoken to your supervisor about this?"

Cayman: "Yes, I told her it's too hard but she said that this is my job now. It's not fair."

Support a person with their concern

Hans: "OK, so tell me what's changed and what you find difficult."

Cayman: "I still pack the pamphlets in the boxes. That's OK. Richard used to take the boxes to the shops in the street. He left. Now I have to do it."

Hans: "Don't you like visiting the shop owners?"

Cayman: "I really like them, they're really nice."

Hans: "If you like them, what do you mean by 'It's too hard'?"

Cayman: "I keep getting lost going there."

Hans: "Have you told your supervisor that you keep getting lost?"

Cayman: "No."

Hans: "Would you like some assistance in talking to your supervisor about getting lost?"

Cayman: "Yes please."

Hans: "What would you like to happen, Cayman?"

Cayman: I want a map and someone to show me where to go.

Follow up

Hans: "Will you like your job Cayman if we get this resolved?"

Cayman: "Yes, I like working here."

Sita

In this scenario, the employment consultant again uses his communication skills to support Cayman in finding a solution to her situation. He asks her a number of straightforward concrete questions, what outcome she would like and allows her to decide the best course of action.

Activity

Can you identify the parts of the conversation where Hans used effective communication skills and strategies to support Cayman in preparing to speak to her supervisor?

Look at the following lines of dialogue, and select the communication skill or strategy the worker was using.

1. **If you like them, what do you mean by 'It's too hard'?**
   a. Checking whether Cayman is satisfied with the outcome.
   b. Assisting Cayman to communicate the situation.
   c. Working with Cayman to identify what solution she would like.
   d. Supporting Cayman to identify the problem.

2. **Would you like some assistance in talking with your supervisor about getting lost?**
   a. Checking whether Cayman is satisfied with the outcome.
   b. Assisting Cayman to communicate the situation.
   c. Working with Cayman to identify what solution she would like.
   d. Supporting Cayman to identify the problem.

3. What would you like to happen, Cayman?

    a. Checking whether Cayman is satisfied with the outcome.

    b. Assisting Cayman to communicate the situation.

    c. Working with Cayman to identify what solution she would like.

    d. Supporting Cayman to identify the problem.

4. Will you like your job again, Cayman, if we get this resolved?

    a. Checking whether Cayman is satisfied with the outcome.

    b. Assisting Cayman to communicate the situation.

    c. Working with Cayman to identify what solution she would like.

    d. Supporting Cayman to identify the problem.

Feedback ✔

1. The best response is d. supporting Cayman to identify the problem.
2. The best response is b. assisting Cayman to communicate the situation.
3. The best response is c. working with Cayman to identify what solution she would like.
4. The best response is a. checking whether Cayman is satisfied with the outcome.

Module conclusion

Sita

You've completed 'Essential skills, module 1'. Here are the key learning points from the module.

When you're ready, go to 'Essential skills, module 2'.

Key learning points

- Communication is crucial in supporting people with disability.
- A variety of essential communication skills will assist you when communicating with people with disability.
- Use a range of communication strategies to suit different individuals' requirements.
- Identify a range of communication skills and techniques to deal with difficult and/or complex situations:
  o Understanding the situation.
  o Supporting a person with their concerns.
  o Following up.

Essential skills, module 2

Module introduction

In this module, you'll learn about:

- continuous learning and development
- on-the-job learning
- taking responsibility for your learning
- responding to change.

Sita waiting to meet some of her friends and colleagues in a cafe

Sita

I'm catching up with some friends from work in the café here. We're all meeting up before going off to work or to college. I'm studying for a Certificate IV in Disability. This module is all about continuous learning and development in the disability sector.

Continuous learning and development

In the disability sector we have found that a culture where employees are committed to and practice continuous learning and development, benefits not only employees, but everyone.

- Employees benefit from enhanced job satisfaction and career opportunities.
- People with disability benefit from the delivery of quality services.
- Organisations benefit from improved work practices and performance.

What is continuous learning and development?

So what is continuous learning and development? It is life-long, planned learning that contributes to your work and your personal growth. Imagine it like a continuous circle.

First you identify your goals and career aspirations. Then make a plan. Then extend your knowledge, skills and understanding. Finally you evaluate and reflect. And so it continues. And into the centre of the plan we place the people with disability we support.
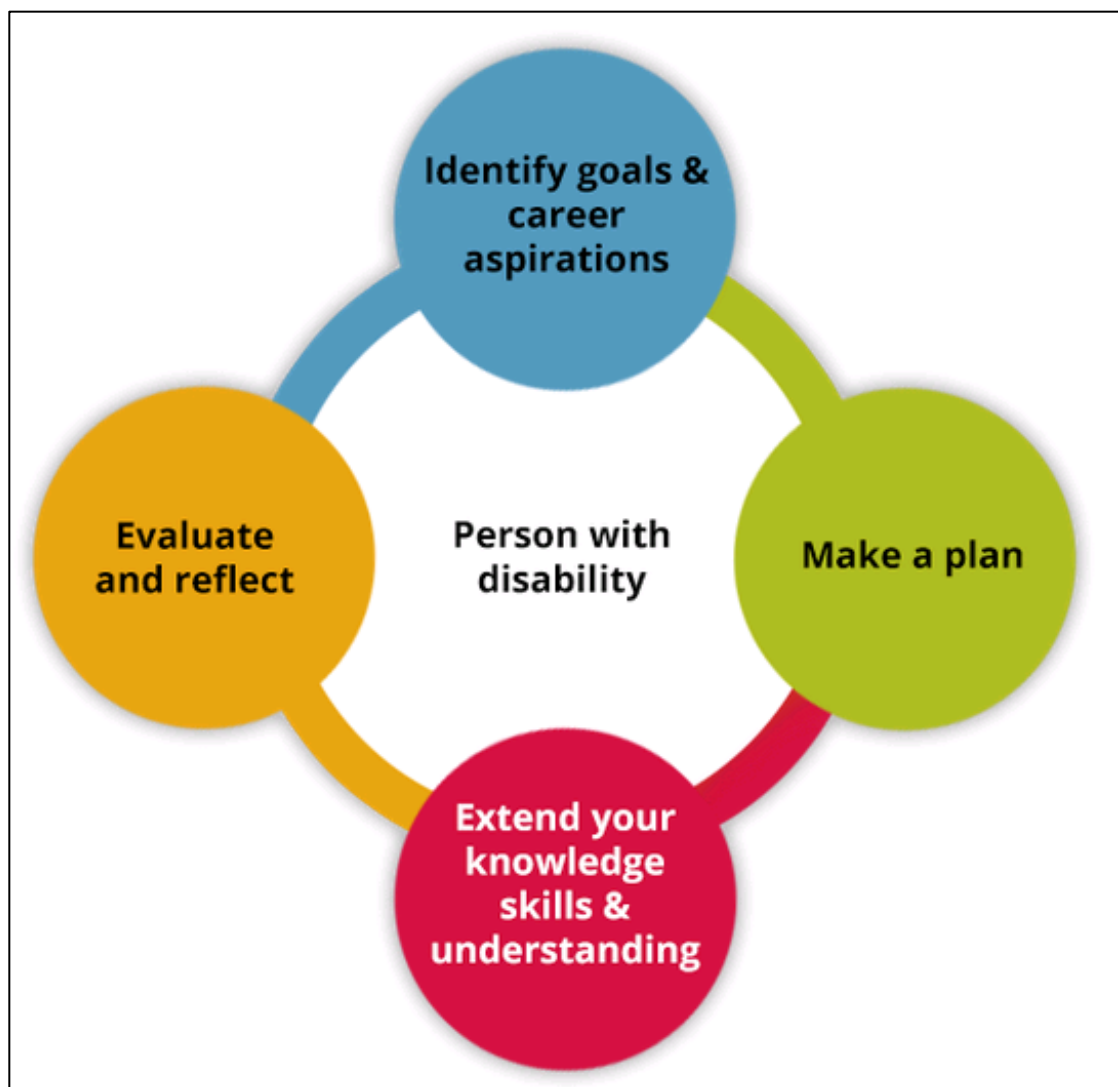
A circle surrounds text in the centre: person with disability. The surrounding circle shows four parts. These are labelled: identify goals and career aspirations, make a plan, extend your knowledge skills and understanding, evaluate and reflect.

A balancing act

When applying a person-centred approach to your learning and development, you will need to balance the perspectives of the people with disability you support, with your personal and professional goals and aspirations. You also need to consider the needs of your organisation.
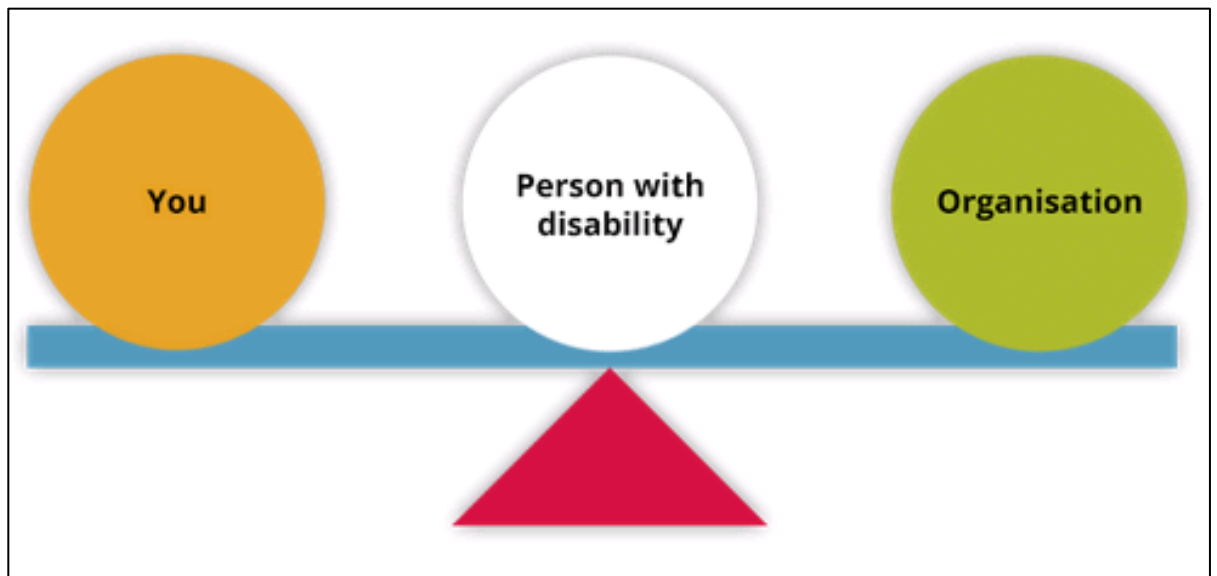
The balancing act is represented by a seesaw. A ball labelled: you is at one end, a ball labelled: organisation is at the other end and a ball labelled: person with disability in the middle.

Types of continuous learning and development

Continuous learning and development in the disability sector may include both formal and informal types of learning. Let's take a look at what that means for me. Select 'formal learning' and 'informal learning'.

Formal learning

Sita in front of her local college where she studies for a formal qualification

Sita's formal learning and development in the disability sector includes:

- working towards formal qualifications
- attending workshops and conferences
- mentoring (where it is a structured and scheduled approach with defined outcomes)
- supervision

Informal learning

Sita in the home of a person with disability she supports

Sita learns every day from the work that she does and from the people with disability and her colleagues that she works with. This includes:

- on-the-job training
- learning through experience
- mentoring (where it is a less structured approach like shadowing a colleague)
- networking

Sita

Your employer, like mine, will provide you with some opportunities for development, but it is also crucial that you take ownership and be accountable for your own learning as well.

My friends have told me how I can be more accountable for my own professional development. Here are some of their ideas that have assisted me in getting the most out of my experiences.

Communicate

- Ask questions.
- Share stories about successes, challenges, ideas and what you have learned.
- Continually listen to and learn from the people you support. Focus on what is important in achieving the best outcomes for people with disability, yourself and your organisation.

Reflect

'Reflection' in the disability sector means thoughtfully considering your experiences. This allows you to identify your strengths and development needs and improve your practice. Take time to reflect on, and learn from:

- your experiences
- feedback from people with disability, their family and friends, your peers, your supervisor and others in the workplace.

Seek

Seek new opportunities:

- to be innovative and creative
- to learn, both formally and informally
- that provide professional development that will support your growth.

What is on-the-job learning?

You might be surprised by how much informal learning occurs on-the-job. I'm catching up with Brad and Lee who work in the disability sector and who can tell us more.

Sita with Brad and Lee who both work in the disability sector, in the cafe

Lee

Lee sitting in the café discussing how she develops her team members

"Hi, I'm Lee and I manage a team of support workers who assist adults with disability to participate in a range of community activities. The type of work they are doing is changing with the implementation of the NDIS.

The team have agreed that they want to develop, learn and improve service delivery through a 'reflective practice' approach, which is where they will learn from their own professional experiences and the experiences of others.

We make sure everyone has time to reflect on their experiences. We encourage team members to ask questions and share stories about their successes, challenges, ideas and what they have learnt from these experiences."

Activity

Lee likes to find creative and practical ways to encourage her team members with their ongoing professional and personal development. Can you help Lee? Which of these examples do you think are useful on-the-job learning experiences she could support them with?

Select one or more option.

a. peer support
b. coaching
c. sharing of best practice
d. attending a disability sector evening course.

Feedback ✔

The correct options are:

    a. peer support

    b. coaching

    c. sharing of best practice

All of these are good examples of on-the-job learning. There are more on the next page. Attending a disability sector evening course would be more formal training.

Other informal learning options

Here are some other ways Lee provides on-the-job learning experiences to her team members.

Personal development plans

Everyone has a personal development plan that details their individual skills, knowledge and capabilities and development needs. In the plan we also capture a range of on-the-job and formal learning opportunities to support their development.

Peer support, coaching and networking

Peer support and coaching is arranged for team members within the organisation. Team members also network with practice communities, that is, people in similar roles in either our organisation or other organisations, to share information on providing best practice. This takes place through meetings and online blogs.

Learning about person-centred approaches

At staff meetings, we always have an agenda item where we discuss person-centred approaches. When available, a person with disability also joins our meetings. Recently, a colleague shared with the team an approach she and one of the people she supports had used to achieve a successful outcome and thought others may benefit from their experience.

Recognising success and improvement

My organisation recognises successes and improvements in practice, both at an individual and organisational level. Last month, for example, two staff members got movies tickets for the ideas they put forward and which were implemented within the organisation.

Reflective practice approach

We also make sure everyone has time to reflect on their experiences. We encourage staff to ask questions and share stories about successes, challenges, ideas and what they have learned.

Promoting learning opportunities

We have a pin-board in the staff room where we advertise learning opportunities. We encourage staff to add articles, course brochures and workshop flyers.

Brad

Brad sitting in the café discussing how he is improving his practice when working with people with intellectual disabilities

"Hi, I'm Brad. I started work in the disability sector as a graduate psychologist. I am now in my second year of working in the sector. I want to improve my practice when working with people with intellectual disabilities, so I'm participating in a group supervision session with my

supervisor and another colleague. Mentoring and coaching enhances my professional development. Let's see how that supervision session goes."

A group supervision session like Brad's is just one of the ways we can learn and develop whilst on-the-job in the disability sector.

Let's see what happens in one of Brad's group supervision sessions and how he and his colleagues can benefit and learn more on-the-job and from reflection.

Brad with his supervisor (left) and his colleague (right) at a supervision session

Brad: "I have one situation I would like to discuss. Ali is one of the people I support. She has an intellectual disability, coupled with mental health issues. She works in a café and, most of the time, she's very good at her job, but sometimes she experiences anxiety when serving customers. She's frustrated by this because she has to serve people every day and she feels it's getting in the way of doing her job well. Does anyone have any suggestions?"

Effie: "Anxiety in adults is more common than people realise. It's great that Ali recognises and acknowledges what she is experiencing. It means you can speak to her openly about it."

Supervisor: "Does she know what triggers her feelings of anxiety?"

Brad: "Yes, she does. She's okay with the regular customers. It's usually when she has to serve a new customer or someone she doesn't know."

Effie: "Have you thought about suggesting she finds someone at work she trusts, so she can talk about her feelings and ask for assistance with new customers?"

Supervisor: "Yes, that's a good short-term approach until you can work together on longer-term strategies. Any other ideas?"

Summary

A group supervision session like Brad's is just one of the ways we can learn and develop whilst on-the-job in the disability sector.

Taking responsibility for your learning and development

Brad and Lee have told us a lot about their experiences of learning and development. What can you do if you're ambitious to make your future in the disability sector? Let's meet Lena to see what else we can find out.


Lena in the café discussing about her current role in the disability sector and how she wants to develop her career further

Lena has worked as an administrator for two years at a disability service provider. Her daily tasks include a range of duties including answering phone enquiries and making referrals for people with disability and assisting in matching people with disability with employees.

She would like to use the skills and knowledge she has learnt to move into a program coordination role within the organisation.

"It's important that you take ownership of your own learning and development. Let me show you my diary. I have developed a long term learning and development plan."
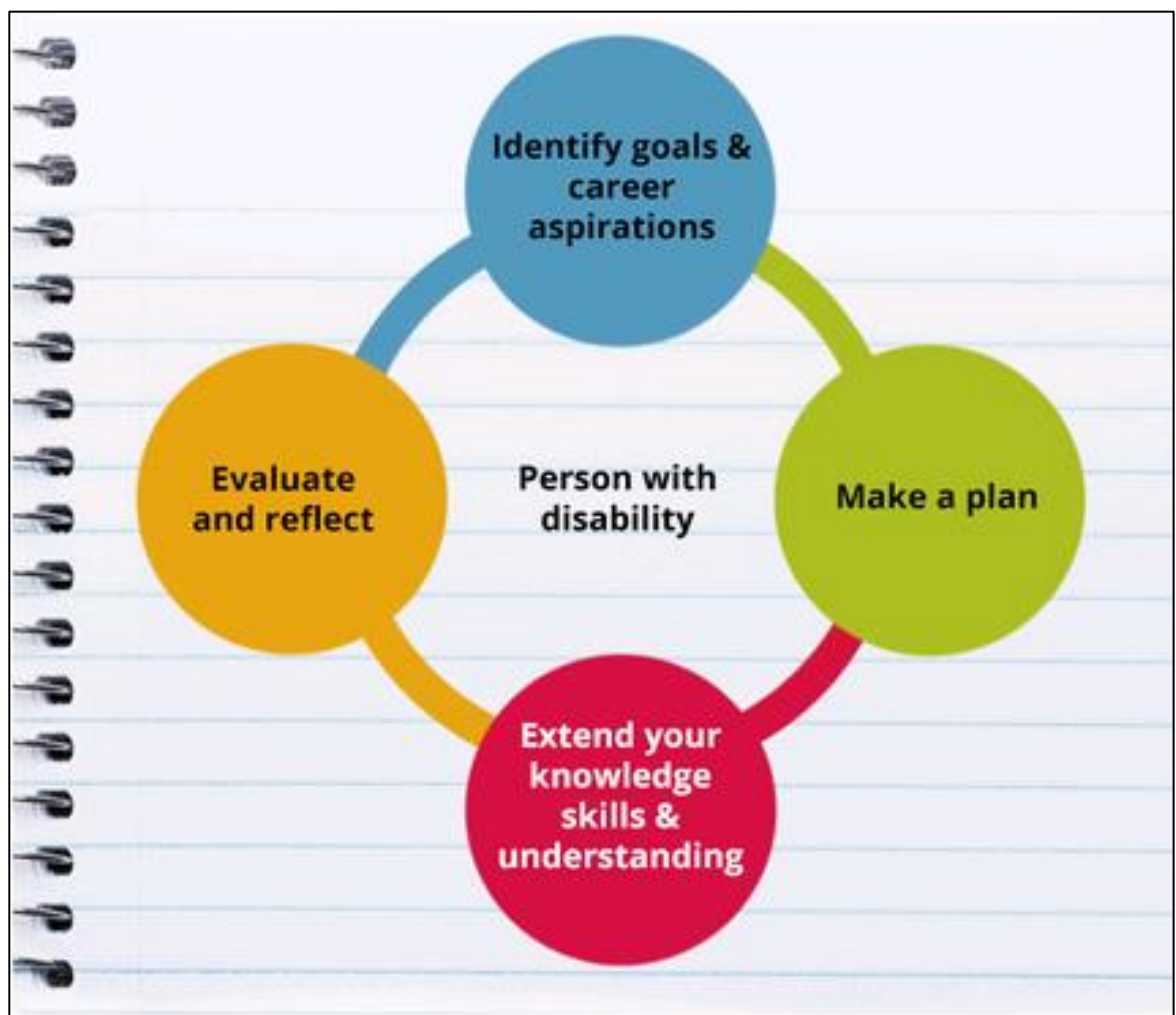
A page from Lena's dairy with a diagram of a circle surrounding text in the centre: person with disability. The surrounding circle shows four parts. These are labelled identify goals and career aspirations, make a plan, extend your knowledge skills and understanding, evaluate and reflect.

45

Let's look at some of the things Lena can reflect on as she works on her own learning and development plan.

Identify goals and career aspirations

- What are your personal goals and professional career aspirations?
- How will these help you, your organisation, as well as the people you support?

Make a plan

- What are your strengths, skills, knowledge and attributes?
- What opportunities are there for development?
- What outcomes do you want for you, your organisation and the people you support?

Extend your knowledge, skills and understanding

- What formal and informal learning opportunities are available to you?
- Are there supervisors and mentors that can help?
- What works for you?
- Are there policies, legislation or guidelines you should know about?
- What other resources are available, such as articles and books?
- What professional organisations and networks can you participate in?

Evaluate and reflect

- What skills and knowledge have you gained to improve your practice?
- What feedback have you received?
- What can you do better or differently?
- How can your new skills assist others?
- What areas of practice can you still improve?

- What are your new goals or current goals to ensure continuous learning and development?

Activity

Let's check if you understand the different stages of Lena's learning and development cycle. Here are some statements from Lena.

1. **Select the statements that match stage 1: identify goals and career aspirations.**
    a. I have identified that I need to gain skills in the use of relevant software.
    b. I want a role within the organisation with more responsibility.
    c. I will complete a software training course at college.
    d. I aspire to a management position.

2. **Select the statements that match stage 2: make a plan.**
    a. I have identified my strengths in customer service, planning and sector knowledge.
    b. I know I need to expand my knowledge of rostering and matching staff to meet the needs of people with disability.
    c. I will set a date to review my progress with my manager.
    d. I will shadow a current program coordinator.

3. **Select the statement that matches stage 3: extend your knowledge, skills and understanding.**
    e. I will seek feedback from my peers.
    f. I aspire to a management position.
    g. I will map out long-term and short-term outcomes.
    h. I will meet with my manager to discuss the changes taking place in the disability sector.

4. **Select the statements that match stage 4: evaluate and reflect.**
    a. I want a role within the organisation with more responsibility.
    b. I will seek feedback from current program coordinators.
    c. I have set a time to review my development with my supervisor.
    d. I plan to shadow a current program coordinator.

Feedback

1. Matching statements:

    a. I want a role within the organisation with more responsibility.

    b. I aspire to a management position.

2. Matching statements:

    a. I have identified my strengths in customer service, planning and sector knowledge.

    b. I know I need to expand my knowledge of rostering and matching staff to meet the needs of people with disability.

3. Matching statement:

    d. I will meet with my manager to discuss the changes taking place in the disability sector.

4. Matching statements:

    b. I will seek feedback from current program coordinators.

    c. I have set a time to review my development with my supervisor.

Responding to change

Sometimes, continuous learning and development is not just about learning new skills. It can also be about adapting to change. Let find out what Lena and her manager, Bob, talked about when they met at the café.

Lena and her manager, Bob, meet at the cafe

Bob: "At our last team meeting we talked about the changes that are taking place in the disability sector with the introduction of the NDIS. As you will remember we spoke about how people with disability will be at the centre of all decision making and that funding will go directly to the person rather than to organisations like ours. This will change how we do everything."

Lena: "Yes Bob, it was really interesting to find out more about the changes, but I'm a bit worried about how they might affect me and my work. What can I do to prepare for the changes?

As an administrator, how could Lena respond to the changes taking place with the introduction of the NDIS? How could her manager also respond to the changes? Let's find out.

Lena

Lena can respond to the changes taking place by:

- asking questions
- identifying how she can benefit from the changes
- trying different ways of doing things
- maintaining a positive attitude
- networking and sharing ideas with people that can support her through the change.

Bob, Lena's manager

Lena's manager can also respond to the changes by:

- keeping Lena informed of the changes taking place and how they may impact her and the people she works with
- encouraging Lena to talk about any concerns she has
- encouraging Lena to come up with new ideas and ways of doing things
- drawing on Lena's strengths throughout the changes.

Module conclusion

Sita

Well done, you've completed 'Essential skills, module 2'. Here are the key learning points from the module.

When you're ready, go to the next course, where we'll be covering how we maintain a safe work environment for both yourself and others.

Key learning points

- Continuous learning and development is life-long and will benefit you, people with disability and your organisation.
- The stages of the learning and development cycle are:
  1. Identify goals and career aspirations
  2. Make a plan
  3. Extend your knowledge skills and understanding
  4. Evaluate and reflect.
- It is important to take ownership and be accountable for your own learning and development
- Examples of on-the-job learning include:
  - mentoring and coaching
  - problem solving
  - sharing of best practice
  - learning about person-centred approaches
  - talking about outcomes
  - recognition of success.
- We must balance our goals and aspirations with the needs of the people with disability we support and the needs of our organisation.

Resources

Module 1

Auslan

Auslan is the sign language of the Australian Deaf community. The term Auslan, 'Australian sign language' was coined in the early 1980s. However, the language itself is much older. As with other sign languages, Auslan's grammar and vocabulary is very different to English, and, so many of the words used in Auslan don't translate directly.

Many signs in Auslan resemble the meaning of the word or concept. For example, for 'house' the hands form the shape of a roof and walls. Fingerspelling is another feature of Auslan. Words are often spelt out, one letter at a time, using two hands. This is especially done when communicating the names of people or places.

Augmentative and alternative communication

Augmentative and alternative communication, also known as AAC, is a term used to describe the different methods of communication that assist people who can't use verbal speech to communicate.

Unaided systems include signing, gestures and other methods which don't require special materials or equipment.

Aided systems include picture charts, books and specialist technology solutions.

AAC can be personalised to meet each individual's needs. Many forms of AAC include an assistive technology component, like the one shown in the picture.

A person using augmentative and alternative communication

Some people need AAC short term. Others may use it their whole lives. It allows people with disability to express their needs and wants and more fully participate in decisions that affect their lives. There are also benefits for their family members and others around them. It is a way of enabling them to more fully communicate with their loved ones.

Here are some tips for communicating with someone using AAC:

- Remember to give the augmented communicator time to convey the message.
- Be patient.
- Stop and listen.
- Don't be afraid to ask the user to replay or repeat the message if you did not quite understand the first time.
- Try not to interrupt or pre-empt what the person is trying to communicate.
- In a group discussion, ask for the person for their input and include them in the discussion. Remember it's a two way conversation.
- Remember it's not a person's brain function that takes time; it may be their typing or the device.

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Autism

Autism is a neurobiological disorder that is typically life-long. It is part of a group of disorders known as Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). People with ASD may have difficulty with social and communication skills. Many people with ASD also have unusual ways of learning, paying attention or reacting to sensations. In most cases its causes are unknown.

The word 'spectrum' describes the range of difficulties that people with ASD may experience and the degree to which they may be affected. Some people may be able to live relatively normal lives, while others may have an accompanying learning disability and require continued specialist support.

The main areas of difficulty are in social communication, social interaction and restricted or repetitive behaviours and interests.

People on the autism spectrum may also have:

- unusual sensory interests such as sniffing objects or staring intently at moving objects;
- sensory sensitivities including avoiding everyday sounds and textures such as hair dryers, vacuum cleaners and sand;
- intellectual impairment or learning difficulties.

An estimated one in 100 people in Australia have ASD. ASD affects almost four times as many boys as girls.

(Source: http://www.autismspectrum.org.au)

Module 2

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

People with disability, their family and carers require support and services just to meet their basic needs.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) will change the way services are funded and delivered in Australia. It is a national scheme that will provide people with disability with individualised funding during their lifetime. Funding will be based on the person's individual needs and provide flexible support to give people with disability and their families the opportunity to participate in the social, economic and cultural life of Australia.