

Tips on using an "Easy Read" assessment

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This month's blog is written by a team of Social Workers from the North West. Alison worked with one of the team, Gillian, alongside a woman with a learning disability who has a visual impairment and her family. The Social Workers in Gillian's team had a set of images which they had created relying on clip art which on reflection were not suitable for the woman Gillian and Alison were working with. Alison, Gillian and colleagues worked to create an adapted version of the tool, supported by the family, which is shared free as a download. This is what Gillian and colleagues have to say ..

We are a team of social workers who work with people with learning disabilities and autism. When we visit individuals to do social care assessments with them, we often see how hard it is for individuals, their carers and/or their families to understand what a social care assessment involves. We also know that there a lot of questions that a social worker needs to ask about what help a person needs in their life and to find out what is important to them. Sometimes it can feel overwhelming for people when a social worker visits and people don't know what to expect or don't know what questions they are going to be asked.

Under the Care Act 2014, a local authority has a duty to provide information and advice to people in need of social care and support and this includes ensuring that "All information and advice must be provided in formats that help people to understand, regardless of their needs. This may include a range of different types of information, and include working with partners to provide information on different services together."

(Source: Factsheet 1: General responsibilities of local authorities: prevention, information and advice, and shaping the market of care and support services <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-act-2014-part-1-factsheets/care-act-factsheets>).

We work with people who often have difficulties with communicating due to the type of disability they may have. We decided to put together an "Easy Read" assessment, which is a document that shows a lot of pictures with simple questions underneath. The idea is that by using pictures with some simple questions, it will help people to see what types of questions they will be asked and enable them to have a think about the answers before a social worker visits with them to do their assessment. It also gives people a chance to be more personally involved in their own assessment and write their answers or thoughts down on the "Easy Read".

The pictures can also help someone to understand what the question means or is about. Sometimes people like to talk about what the pictures mean to them as individuals and that is good too! Some people can find it reassuring to have the pictures to help them remember in case they forget the question. These are just a few ways in which the "Easy Read" can help people to understand and communicate for their assessment.

Pictures to support a Social Care Assessment



Images used from Boardmaker:
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We developed the "Easy Read" assessment as a tool to help the individuals we work with communicate. We do have to be clear about the fact that it is not what a copy of the actual social care assessment looks like and is intended to be used to help conversation only.

When we use the "Easy Read", we work with the individual, family and / or carers to identify what communication needs a person has. We can then work out what is the best format for the person to use. For example, we can take a plain paper copy printed with colour pictures, or we can laminate a copy and use the pictures like "flash cards". It helps us to know what assists the person when they are looking at the "Easy Read" because some people might have a disability that makes it hard for them to see. In a case like this, we would find out what type of paper would help the person see better (for example, glossy or matte paper), find out what colour paper would be best to use to print it on and find out if the pictures and writing needed to be made bigger, or smaller. There are lots of things to consider!

A lot of people we work with ask us if they can keep their own copy of the "Easy Read" and told us that they like using it.

You can download the Supporting Pictures by clicking [HERE](#)

For practitioners who wish to use the "Easy Read":

The "Easy Read" was designed to break down the social care domains as used in formal assessment documents into more simple questions. We found it helps with transferring the information gathered from it directly into the official social care assessment and highlights the voice of the service user.

Here are our tips on using it as a tool to aid social care assessments:

When discussing someone's initial communication needs, it's useful to know if someone has a visual impairment or disability that will affect the person's ability to see the pictures or their ability to understand what the pictures relate to. Not all individuals will come to the same understanding of what a picture is trying to convey!

Find out if the person needs pictures to be bigger or smaller, what type of paper or colour would help them see better, or if words would be better than pictures. Think about whether converting it to be used as "flash cards" may be more suitable in some cases.

Give a copy of the "Easy Read" to an individual in advance of the assessment. Most of the positive feedback we received was around how individuals felt it gave them time to go through it and understand what they would be asked prior to the assessment visit. We also received feedback that it helped people feel good about the opportunity to express their own thoughts and wishes.

It's always worth carrying a few blank copies with you to visits, as sometimes even if you send a copy out in advance, it can get misplaced or people might change their minds about what they've written.'



Although the Social Work team have found the document very useful, from Total Communication Services CIC perspective, we recognise the limitations of the document, it was designed to support a woman which is reflected in some of the images, hopefully it provides a starting point for a more person centred approach.

Please do get in touch with feedback. We feel it is a good starting point.

Finally, Jois Stansfield, Emeritus Professor of Speech Pathology, Faculty of Health, Psychology and Social Care at Manchester Metropolitan University reviewed the document and had this to say:

'This is a really good selection of images. They are clearly presented and have just enough written support. It is especially good to see sensitive subjects (for example using the toilet, same sex relationships) being explicit. I expect they will be of great value in supporting social work interventions. As with all such tools, it needs to be stressed that these are not stand alone or substitutes for person to person communication and it is important to recognise that effectiveness in using them depends upon a person centred approach and the verbal and non-verbal skills of the professional to ensure they accurately gauge the communicative ability of the individual service user.'

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