Communication Support

Removing Barriers at Work

A practical guide to making workplace information, meetings and conversations more accessible. Start with the person’s communication preferences, agree useful changes and review whether they work.

Communication is part of access

A barrier can arise when information is delivered too quickly, only verbally, through an inaccessible document, in a noisy space or without time to process and respond. Support should fit the person, the task and the setting. Preferences can differ and may change between situations.

Common barriers and options to explore

SITUATION	POSSIBLE SUPPORT	AGREE
Meetings	Agenda and documents in advance; captions or interpretation; one speaker at a time; a quieter space; written follow-up.	How will I follow and contribute?
Instructions	Clear ordered steps; plain language; written summary; demonstration; time to check meaning.	Which format helps me act on this?
Phone or video calls	Captions; relay or text options; agreed video setup; alternative contact route where practical.	What channel works reliably?
Complex information	Accessible documents; defined terms; Easy Read or other agreed format; time to process and ask questions.	What should be clarified or repeated?
Sharing a response	Chat, writing, AAC, voice input, signing, note-taking or a follow-up response, according to preference.	How do I want to communicate back?

Start with the person’s preference. Ask what helps and what does not. Do not assume a communication method based on diagnosis, disability or role.

A useful first question

“What part of this work communication is hardest, and what would make it easier for you?” Keep the discussion specific, respectful and confidential.

The goal is fair access to information, decisions and participation—not forcing someone to use a particular method.

Quick task map

Name the work task first, then describe the communication demand and the change that might help. For example: a fast spoken handover → missed action details → a brief written action list and time for questions.

TASK OR MOMENT	WHAT WOULD HELP?
My task or communication moment	_____
What happens now?	_____
What change could I try?	_____

Everyday communication that works

Plan before, during and after

Small predictable changes can reduce misunderstandings and make it easier for everyone to take part. Agree the method with the worker or candidate, then make the arrangements routine rather than waiting for a problem.

Meeting checklist

- Share the purpose, agenda, names of speakers and key papers early in an accessible format.
- Explain acronyms, specialist terms and decisions that need to be made.
- Agree captions, interpretation, note-taking, seating, audio or other support before the meeting.
- Use one speaker at a time. Pause between points and allow processing time.
- Offer a way to contribute by speaking, chat, writing, signing, AAC or after the meeting.
- Summarise decisions, action owners and deadlines in writing.

Communication across a work task

STEP	PRACTICAL CHECK
Before	What is the purpose? What information should be shared in advance? Which format and support are agreed?
During	Can the person follow, ask questions and contribute? Is the pace, noise level and turn-taking working?
After	Are decisions, next steps and dates clear? Is there a contact route for questions or corrections?

Technology and alternative formats

Live captions, speech-to-text, transcripts, accessible documents and communication apps may help. Check accuracy and whether workplace IT permits the tool. Recordings, transcripts, cloud services and shared documents can contain sensitive information; confirm storage, access and retention before use.

> Check-in: “Is this format working for you today, or would another way of communicating help?”

Good practice

Make changes discreetly and consistently. Avoid speaking for someone, finishing their words or sharing disability information without agreement. Ask before changing an established support arrangement.

Adjustments and specialist support

Agree responsibilities and review

Workplace communication changes can include a different format, a change to how a meeting runs, assistive technology or specialist communication support. Agree what will be tried, who will arrange it and when it will be reviewed.

Employer reasonable adjustments

In Great Britain, employers must consider reasonable adjustments where a disabled worker would otherwise be substantially disadvantaged. The appropriate adjustment depends on the circumstances and should be discussed with the person. The employer's duty is separate from Access to Work funding.

How Access to Work may fit

- Access to Work can help with practical support for eligible people in work, including some support worker arrangements.
- A separate Access to Work route can help fund communication support at eligible job interviews. Apply before the interview and check the current process.
- Access to Work does not pay for reasonable adjustments that the employer is legally responsible for making.
- Eligibility, support and funding are assessed under the relevant rules. Do not assume that an application, provider or cost will be approved.

Choose the right communication professional

Different roles are not interchangeable. A qualified interpreter supports interpretation between languages or communication modes. A Communication Support Worker may assist access through agreed techniques such as note-taking or supporting communication in English; the role is not automatically interpreting. Ask the person what they need for the task and confirm the provider's qualifications and remit.

Questions to resolve before a trial

- Which work tasks and situations need support?
- What method does the person prefer, and what alternatives are acceptable?
- Who will book, approve, fund, set up and review the support?
- Do workplace IT, confidentiality and data protection rules permit the proposed tools?
- How will the person tell you if the support needs to change?

Keep the person involved. Check support in practice, invite feedback privately and revise the arrangement when work, health or communication needs change.

My communication support plan

A printable worksheet for a workplace conversation

Complete only the sections that are useful. Keep a copy and share only the information needed for the conversation or agreed support.

My role, work goal or setting

_____

Communication task I want to make easier

_____

_____

What creates a barrier? When does it happen?

_____

_____

My preferred communication method, format or support

_____

_____

Changes or specialist support I want to explore

_____

_____

Questions about booking, IT, privacy, cost or funding

_____

_____

Who I will speak to and my next step

Person or service: _____ Next step: _____

When we will review it: _____ What will show it is helping? _____

Official information

HSE — Effective and accessible communication: hse.gov.uk/disability/best-practice/accessible-communication.htm
GOV.UK — Reasonable adjustments for workers: gov.uk/reasonable-adjustments-for-disabled-workers
GOV.UK — Access to Work: gov.uk/access-to-work
GOV.UK — Communication support at job interviews: gov.uk/guidance/apply-for-communication-support-at-a-job-interview-if-you-have-a-disability-or-health-condition-access-to-work

General information only. Check current official guidance and local workplace procedures. The guide is not a substitute for individual advice or an Access to Work decision.