



## Actions to take to improve communication accessibility in legal spaces

Many judges, lawyers and people working in the justice system in Aotearoa are aware of the heavy communication demands typically involved in legal interactions, and the high numbers of participants who find communication challenging. These stakeholders have intentionally learned to simplify their language and use compensatory communication strategies which make it easier for people to understand and participate in legal processes.

These people:

1. Plan their communication carefully and know what THIS person needs – know whether there are any particular communication needs that need specific accommodations.
2. Know that legal interactions might be overwhelming and stressful so provide breaks and do their best to make the participant feel comfortable.
3. Call people by name so that the person knows that they are being addressed and talk directly to the participant in language at the right level for them and in the right language – provide an interpreter if needed.
4. Provide a simple explanation of what the interaction is all about and what the key decisions are going to be.

*This is about deciding if you can  
go home or need to stay in residence*

5. Signpost topics – clearly signalling the start and end each topic  
*“First, we’re going to talk about ...We’ve finished talking about ...Now, let’s talk about...”*

6. Use jargon when needed but provide simple definitions.
7. Check understanding effectively – NOT just say ‘do you understand?’.
8. Signal when a complex legal discussion is about to happen and reassure the person that they will be told the outcome. This lets the person know that they do not have to keep straining to pay attention. They can rest knowing they will get a simpler explanation of the important information.
9. Recap in simpler language any complex conversations that have taken place in ‘legal jargon’ during the proceeding.
10. Recap the main things that have been discussed or decided. This helps the person to keep track of the conversation and understand the outcome.
11. Clearly and simply state what is going to happen afterwards – any events, expectations, rules, conditions that need to be clearly understood.
12. Provide an opportunity to go through information slowly afterwards and ensure everything that needs to have been understood has been reliably understood and retained by the person and their whānau.
13. Make sure that written information is at the right level for the person to comprehend.



### Watch out – are you checking understanding effectively?

Most of us won't say when we are confused or unsure. We do not want to feel shamed or stupid.

Try asking young person to tell you what they think you said.

Review and write it down.



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