

# Communicating with Health Care Providers

How you can be a health care communication champ for the people you support.

## Before the appointment:

### Explore and understand any worries the person has about the appointment:

- Ask about their fears - don't avoid this topic. Validate how important their feelings are to you.
- Help them to overcome their fears and worries. Discuss and review strategies that might be helpful:
  - *Preparing a social story? Doing a site tour? Watching a demonstration video?*
  - *Role playing and practicing? Making note of a favourite item to bring?*
- Record information in the **About My Health tool**, and be sure to bring it to the appointment.

**Did you know?**  
Easyhealth.org.uk has loads of health care videos made with and for people with IDD.

### Help the person to understand what will happen at the appointment:

- Be truthful, *but supportive*. (*'I'm sorry this might hurt. We will try to be quick.'*)
- If you minimize what will happen (for example, saying *'it won't hurt much'* to have blood taken), this tells a person that you can't be trusted, or that they are weak because it did hurt for them, but not you. This may fracture your relationship, while also making that person even *more* afraid about health care visits in the future. This may seem helpful for a moment, but when we think about it, it is not helpful at all.
- Review with the provider if there are ways to make things more comfortable.
- When booking the appointment, ask if it's possible to have extra time booked for the appointment.

## During the appointment:

### Help promote positive communication with the provider:

- Encourage and support the person to express their feelings: any questions, pains, worries. You may need to initiate this during the appointment. Ask the individual's permission before you share any sensitive information.

### Role model ideal communication to the provider:

- As the DSP, you have expert knowledge about how to enhance communication. Techniques you can demonstrate to the health care provider may include:
  - If a question is posed to you, redirect it to the person you are supporting: make eye contact, ask the person directly, modify your language if needed.
  - Rephrase difficult concepts or medical jargon (and don't be afraid to ask the health care provider to explain it to you too).
  - Suggest concrete wording instead of abstract/open ended questions.(e.g. "Are you happy? Mad? Sad?" - instead of "How's your mood?").
  - Pause and give enough time for a response before repeating or trying again.
  - Use the **My Health Care Visit tool** to record information.
  - Use visual aids, gestures or written information if that will foster understanding.
  - If you are asked to make a decision, remind the provider that you are not a decision-maker for the individual, but you will help to support the individual's decision, and locate their decision

## After the appointment:

### Reflect and Review

*\*See the Health Care Decision Making tool for more information.*

- Review how the visit went.
- If it went well reinforce the individual for being their own self advocate.
- If there were problems debrief about what can be done next time.

# Appointment Preparation

## Summary Checklist

The following is a summary of the things to discuss with the person you support to help increase the success of the medical appointment.



### Stages of the appointment to plan for:

#### Before

- Practice running through the appointment with the person you are supporting.
- Track the health care issue/symptoms using a tracking sheet.
- Bring preferred items to help with waiting.
- Have “**About My Health**” and “**My Health Care Visit**” tools and any other data you were tracking, ready to show the doctor.
- Arrive on time.
- Ask about a quiet waiting space.
- Have up-to-date contact information for the person’s substitute decision maker (see “**About My Health**”) in case the doctor needs to contact them for any health care decisions.
- Other ideas:

#### Start

- Ask before sharing information about the person you are supporting.
- Give the health care provider the “**About My Health**” tool and “**My Health Care Visit**” tool and any other data you were tracking.
- Model the best way to communicate.
- Involve the person you are supporting.
- Support the communication process.
- Other ideas:

#### Exam

- Check in with the person you are supporting.
- Ask the health care provider to explain before they start.
- Ask for a demonstration when possible.
- Ask the health care provider to deliver one instruction at a time/to slow down.
- Other ideas:

#### Summary

- If the person you are supporting wants someone from their family to hear what the doctor thinks, try to include them.
- If health care decisions require a substitute decision maker, know who that person would be and have their contact information available.
- Make sure the information is understood as best as possible by the person you are supporting.
- Other ideas:

#### Wrap up

- Make a note of what happened and what was decided in the “**My Health Care Visit**” tool.
- Make sure instructions are understood.
- Other ideas:



“Be my microphone, not my voice.”

- Dave Hingsburger