

“Be kind and respect each other”:

The Inclusion Ambassadors’ guide on language and communication for pupils and staff in schools

Introduction



The Inclusion Ambassadors are a group of children and young people from across Scotland with a range of additional support needs. The group work together to discuss issues that affect them and ensure their views are heard in national decision making relating to education.

All children and young people have the right to education,¹ which must be child-centred, empowering and provided in a way that respects children’s inherent dignity. It should enable them to express their views and participate in school life.²

The group want to make school a more inclusive place for young people with additional support needs. A big part of this is raising awareness and improving understanding of what they need.

We have created this guide in collaboration with the Ambassadors who have provided the examples used throughout. It is a resource for both children, young people and the adults who work with them. It is intended to support your understanding on how young people with additional support needs want people to speak to them and why this is important.

We believe this resource can support school staff, and all those working with young people with additional support needs, to use positive and respectful language, and facilitate good communication amongst young people and their peers.

We would encourage staff to use this guide for their own learning and development and as a reflection on how communication happens in their classrooms. In addition, they should take time to reflect on whether they realise what is in here and put this guidance into practice. A series of activities that could be carried out with the children and young people you work with has been developed as an accompaniment to this guide.

Ultimately, we hope this guide will be used as a tool to stimulate further discussion between staff and pupils about how the language used and the ways you communicate can be better and more inclusive. Doing so will greatly improve the experiences of the pupils you work with.

¹ United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child Articles 28 and 29.

² United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 10 (2001).

Why is using the right language important?



Young people with additional support needs consistently tell us about the importance of good communication. A big part of effective communication is using the right language to show understanding and respect. Doing so also supports involvement and in turn, positive outcomes, in a number of ways.

Improves relationships

Young people with additional support needs have told us how important trusting relationships are. They help people feel more comfortable, safe and relaxed in school. Having a trusted teacher or staff member makes school life easier. In addition, creating an environment where young people feel they can ask questions or raise any issues they might be having is vital for success. Using the right language and communicating effectively helps build these relationships.

Respectful communication is also important outside of the classroom, helping children and young people feel able to develop relationships with their peers.

Improves understanding

Better communication brings about mutual understanding of a situation and makes it easier to find resolutions for issues. It creates a calmer and safer environment for everyone, allowing pupils to speak their mind and share their views.

If teachers and pupils take the time and effort to understand young people with additional support needs as individuals, they are better able to acknowledge and appreciate their preferred ways of communicating. One Ambassador shared how standing with their arms crossed helps them feel less nervous but that they can be seen as “standoffish” and “rude”. As they put it, young people are “*not being rude on purpose, expression is different for everyone*”.

Improves learning

Based on our extensive work with children and young people, we believe that communicating effectively to improve relationships and understanding in schools has a positive impact on learning.

Using the right language ensures that pupils understand learning material better, feel comfortable to ask questions and feel more included.

The impact of poor communication



Negative or inappropriate language and communication in school can damage relationships and impede learning. It can escalate disagreements and lead to misunderstandings between peers, as well as between pupils and teachers. It can make school a less enjoyable and harder experience for children and young people with additional support needs as they feel unsupported or not listened to.

Dos and don'ts



“Don’t just apply things you’ve heard, ask young people themselves what works best for us!”

Using their own experiences, the group identified what young people and staff in schools should, and should not, do.



Dos

- **Do** make time to identify preferred communication practices. If someone has an additional support need, they may process information differently. This could mean finding an alternative way to explain something, giving clear and relatable examples and/or using visual aids.
- **Do** ask what support young people need to be happy at school. Asking pupils open questions about support can make them feel reassured and able to discuss what they need. One Ambassador told us: *“One teacher said to me when they knew I was finding things hard, ‘What would make your life here easier?’ That made me feel seen and understood.”*
- **Do** explain clearly and calmly why something needs to be done in a different way. For example, *“What you’ve said might be rude to other people, but I know that you didn’t mean it to be”*. This makes processing what you are saying easier by showing acceptance and understanding of the intention, without being critical.
- **Do** speak to all pupils with respect. Do not talk down or condescend.
- **Do** use appropriate language. Avoid using jargon or overly complicated language. Staff should also ensure they use a pupil’s preferred pronouns.
- **Do** encourage respectful and supportive peer-to-peer communication. Encourage inclusion of those with additional support needs in group activities (if appropriate) and support their peers in meaningful and respectful communication. Share your learning, offer support. Encourage more learning and awareness in class of various disabilities and additional support needs and how to best communicate with their classmates with an additional support needs.
- **Do** try to be good-humoured and friendly.



Don'ts

- **Don't** shout or be argumentative. Shouting shouldn't happen at either side (i.e. by staff or pupils). As one Ambassador pointed out, *"Shouting makes people not want to listen, they shut down and phase out"*.
- **Don't** make passive aggressive remarks
- **Don't** use punishment or disciplinary action without explaining why. Not giving a chance for conversation does not help solve the issue.
- **Don't** single people out. This can be especially uncomfortable and anxiety inducing for those with additional support needs.
- **Don't** be dismissive about the influence you have. Using phrases such as *"it's out of my hands"* is unhelpful.
- **Don't** be disrespectful or rude about someone's experiences. This includes being dismissive of someone who may be struggling or need additional help to understand.
- **Don't** be judgmental. As one ambassador said, *"It annoys me when people look at someone with a disability and judge them – you need to look past this"*
- **Don't** ask rude or intrusive questions such as *"What's wrong with you?"*. Being curious is welcome, but questions should be asked in a respectful manner.

One Ambassador told us:



***"People asked me, 'Why aren't you walking?'
They should ask me if it don't mind talking
about it rather than launching into a question"***

It is important to stress that this is not an exhaustive list. What works well can be different for everybody. This guide has been created with one group of pupils and should be used as a starting point. What is more important is to engage with children and young people to identify how they want you to communicate with them and what will support them best.

What next?



Throughout this resource we have highlighted the different ways in which members of the Inclusion Ambassadors have stated young people want to be spoken to and what you can do to ensure they feel included and respected at school.

We have also provided a range of suggestions for how you could make use of the resource to develop your own practice.

In the first instance, we would encourage everyone to consider the following reflective questions:



- Have all pupils my class(es) felt included and supported recently?
- What are the biggest barriers to good language/communication in my classroom and how can these be overcome?
- How can I make sure children and young people feel comfortable speaking to me about issues/challenges? What might I be doing that impedes this?

For more resources to help you support young people with additional support needs, and ensure you are offering an inclusive environment, visit the Inclusion Ambassador website: childreninscotland.org.uk/inclusion-ambassadors/

Other activities

We have suggested a series of short activities that can be used to support better communication in your setting. You can access these activities by [clicking on this link](#).

Further information

If you want to know more about the Inclusion Ambassadors work or to chat further about the guidance in this resource, please contact:



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