Summary of communication tips that may help when talking with someone with a disability

1. Ensure you have the person’s attention
   Address the person by name, use eye contact and/or touch.

2. Be aware of known communication difficulties –
   - **Receptive** (e.g. deafness, cognitive impairment, autism spectrum disorder) and/or
   - **Expressive** (e.g. cerebral palsy, autism spectrum disorder)

3. If unsure of ability to understand assume competence & adjust accordingly.
   It is more appropriate and respectful to “assume competence” than assume a lack of understanding.

4. If uncertain ASK about communication preferences/style/techniques
   - How does s/he say “Yes/ No?”
   - Does s/he use a communication device or aid?
   - Check if an Interpreter is required

5. Be appropriate and respectful in your choice of:
   - **Language**: simple, clear words & short uncomplicated sentences.
   - **Visual information**: pictures, diagrams, signs, gestures.
   - **Tone & volume**: a respectful approach reflects your degree of familiarity with the person, their age and the context of your interaction.

6. Wait for a response.
   Allow the person time to listen, process what you say and respond. **DONT RUSH!**

7. Check understanding in the person’s own words
   **DO NOT** simply ask “Do you understand?” Most people will say “Yes”! Remember that receptive language may be better than expressive language (or vice versa).

8. Be honest and take responsibility for communication breakdowns
   e.g. I’m sorry I’m not understanding. **NEVER PRETEND** to understand!

9. If they don’t understand you – KEEP TRYING.
   Repeat the information using clear simple words and concepts. Say it in a different way with different words and try to use pictures.

10. **KEEP TRYING** if you don’t understand –
    Try alternative strategies like:
    - Would you say that again please?
    - Is there another way you can think of saying it?
    - Could you use another word?
    - Could you show me?
    - Is there someone who could help us?
    - **ASK** a family member/carer/support worker if appropriate if they can assist you.