

Making appointments

What this is about

This fact sheet has been written to support frontline staff working in the criminal justice system. It is important to remember that people with learning disabilities or learning difficulties may well have difficulties around time management and planning, particularly if they get little or no support. In addition to these difficulties many are unable to read or write, so they can find it hard to keep appointments. Not attending appointments can have serious consequences for people in contact with the criminal justice system, so it is vital this group of people are supported to attend appointments.

Example

Tom was on bail and had to sign in at the local police station 'by 18.00 hours every day'. When he was given this instruction, he wasn't given any help to understand it or to remember. He thought the time required was 8.00 p.m. and he went to a different police station at first, so he arrived late. This led to him being taken back to court for breaking the conditions of his bail. He was remanded in custody.

What you can do to help

Below are some tips to help you ensure that those you support have every opportunity to attend appointments:

- Ring or text the week before, the day before and even on the day to remind the person.
- You may need to accompany a person to an appointment, especially if it's in a new or different location.
- Some people have anxieties in attending appointments with a new professional or service so will need someone they trust to attend with them for the first few times.
- Check they understand written instructions before writing appointment letters (you may want to see our fact sheet 'Making information easier to read' for some useful tips)
- Check if the person understands the 24 hour clock – some people can only follow a 12 hour cycle. If they use a watch, make sure they know how to tell the time. Some digital watches can be changed manually to a 24 or 12 hour cycle.
- Some people prefer analogue clocks and can understand an appointment time if you draw a clock face for them.
- Help the person to put the date in a calendar or planner – get him/her to bring to meetings so you can add the future dates in it.
- Some people may have an alarm function on their mobile telephone, or they may need help to practise using this function.
- You also need to explain on a regular basis the consequences of not attending appointments. If the person has difficulty understanding you - it may be useful to write these down using simple language, or drawing an image to depict this.
- If there is no way to get hold of the person (sometimes people will have no credit on their mobile telephone) it's useful to have the name of someone who is in contact with the person to remind them.

NB. Some people may be extra prompt and will turn up 2-3 hours early. If your service has no reception area you may need to tell them explicitly not to arrive more than 30 mins before appointment as there is no-where for them to sit.

Example

Richard is a probation officer and supports a client with a mild learning disability who has numerous appointments with a range of services and is unable to tell the time. Richard supported him by typing up and printing out a monthly timetable and listing all the appointments, using a colour code to represent the different services. His client now attends appointments with the correct service at the correct location and at the end of each month he visits Richard who supports him with the next month's appointments.

This is part of a series of fact sheets for people working in the criminal justice system. They are how to spot signs that a person has a learning disability; finding out about other services that may help; communication; making information easier to read; making appointments; making decisions; useful information and resources. To download these or for more information see: <http://www.learningdisabilities.org.uk/our-work/rights-equality/criminal-justice-system/>



**foundation for
people with
learning disabilities**

www.learningdisabilities.org.uk