

Making information easier to read

What this is about

About 1 in 6 of the general public have problems with reading and writing. We know that this is much more common in people in contact with the criminal justice system and that people with a range of learning disabilities and learning difficulties are over-represented. Evidence from the Prison Reform Trust shows that about 1 in 3 adult prisoners have such difficulties (up to 7% have an IQ under 70, and another 25% have an IQ under 80). The kinds of everyday problems that this group of people face include reading (for example, newspapers, bills, letters, posters, texts and emails) and writing (for example, filling out forms). We are constantly bombarded with written information, yet a lot of people cannot make sense of it.

What this means in practice

This means that many people using your service will find it hard to read any of your written information, such as posters, information about rights, appointment letters and directions or maps. They will struggle to fill out forms or to comply with instructions. This makes it likely they will get into more trouble.

What you can do

It is important to find out what help people may need with completing forms or understanding and following written instructions. People are usually relieved if they are offered help and will usually accept it. Simply ask if they need help, rather than if they can read. This reduces stigma and gives a chance for you and the person to develop a better understanding. It is very helpful for all material produced by your service to be in a more accessible style. This involves using easy words and short sentences, and ideally pictures to illustrate points. Many local areas have a group of people with learning disabilities who can adapt information into a more accessible format (also called easy read).

Tips on making information easier

There are different ways that information can be made easier. Here are some general tips:

- Use short sentences. Have just one idea in each sentence
- Text should be in a large font size, minimum 14pt
- Use easy words. Explain any complicated words or terms if you do have to use them
- Use A4 pages wherever possible. A5 or smaller are not so easy
- Consider using images (photos or drawings) to aid understanding. Choose an image to represent each sentence of text if possible. Put images on the left hand side of the page and text on the right (see example)
- Choose a plain font. Avoid fancy fonts and italics

Put in here where to contact your local easy read service:

Further information

If you would like to find out more about how to make information more accessible see:
www.learningdisabilities.org.uk/learning-disability-a-z/e/easy-read

KeyRing has examples of relevant easy read information.
www.keyring.org/cjs-easyread

The Change picture bank has images about the criminal justice free to people working in this area:
www.changepeople.org

Below is an example of an appointment letter that has been adapted into an easier to read format.

 38 Raven Park Lane London CE19 8JE	<small>Gechurch House 1 London Bridge Walk London SE1 2XK London - Kingston</small>	<small>Telephone 0207 803 1100 Fax 0207 803 1111 Email info@fdpl.org.uk Website www.foundingdisabilities.org.uk</small>
Reference group meeting 23 rd February 2015		
	Dear James,	
	The date for your next appointment with the Probation Officer, James Barrymore has been set.	
	The meeting will be held on:	
	Friday 20 th March 2015, 11am-3:00pm.	
	Please let us know if you cannot make this date.	
	The meeting will be held at our office: Police station Tooley Avenue Clapham CT7 8HY	
Kind Regards, Kate Thompson		
changing lives	 Mental Health Foundation	 UNIVERSITY OF LONDON MIND THE GAP Project 2010-2015

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/>