

SENSORY SET UP & SUPPORT

Start sessions by asking what they need. Establish shared control of environment. Respect and validate sensory differences and the challenges they can present.

Lights on or off? Curtains open or drawn? Fan on or off? Computers on or off?

Do you want to sit there or there? Do you want to sit on a chair or the floor?

Make it clear that your office is a space where sunglasses, hats, fidget toys, stretching breaks, etc are allowed and welcome. If you use sensory strategies yourself, demonstrate stating what you need in order to show that it is okay to ask for and seek sensory accommodations during sessions.

BEING A SUPPORTIVE PARTNER

Use live subtitling which is writing or typing what you are saying while you are saying it. Keep the paper or screen accessible so that both parties can look at it throughout the session. Allow the person to refer back and point to previous parts of conversation at any time.

Offer to use their form of communication. Clinician could use a phone or iPad with a text to speech app for part of the session. This evens the playing field and places equal status on the use of AAC. Sample apps: FlipWriter, Co-Writer, Verbally Premium, and Able2Talk.

ASKING GOOD QUESTIONS

Ask 1 question at a time then wait silently, calmly, and warmly for at least 20 seconds. Count the full 20 seconds in your head. Avoid too many open ended questions. They can be draining and confusing.

Ask specific questions, write and give examples of the types of possible answers.

1-5 scales - "Is ___ a 1 terrible, a 3 okay, a 5 wonderful, or something else?"

Likert Scales - "Is ___ exciting, average or boring?"

Yes / No questions - use visual cards with words on them to point to

Offer concise phrases the person can reject or accept - "was that lovely but distracting?"

BE CAUTIOUS ABOUT OUR ASSUMPTIONS

When speech flows easily, people assume that hesitations, voice breaks, and facial expressions hint at a person's internal emotional states and opinions. We risk misreading a person's emotional state and stances if we don't check our assumptions. Alternatively these signals could be due to:

Effort required to understand what is being asked

Concentration on thinking of the right word to say

Confusion about how to integrate apparently incompatible pieces of information

Pausing to find the word on the device or in one's mind

Neurological differences in sensory processing or motor patterns