

Communication needs in legal conferences



Communication in conferences

Whether they are held with your client in advance of a hearing, or take place during the court day, conferences are a key part of your communication with your clients. In these meetings, solicitors and barristers can take instructions, offer legal advice, give updates on cases and provide essential information.

When your client has a communication difficulty, conferences are all the more important. Here, legal professionals can check understanding and take time to ensure their client has a clear understanding of the decisions they must make, and the court processes they will participate in.

Given the significance and complexity of the information which is often discussed in legal conferences, maximizing clear communication is essential. When misunderstandings arise, they can result in adjournments, unclear positions, client disengagement and damage to client-advocate relationships.

Intermediaries and conferences

An intermediary can be booked to attend standalone conferences, subject to securing funding via HMCTS, Legal Aid or (in some cases) a Local Authority.

For a Communicourt intermediary to attend a standalone conference, your client will need to

complete an intermediary assessment which results in a recommendation for intermediary assistance. Once funding for a conference is secured, an intermediary can then be booked via [the Communicourt portal](#).

If an intermediary has been booked to attend court hearings with your client, they will participate in any conferences which take place during the court day - no additional steps need to be taken.



Conference communication tips

The strategies you implement to support a client with communication needs will vary considerably depending on their communication strengths and difficulties. An [intermediary assessment](#) will provide insight into your client's communication profile and make bespoke recommendations to support them at all stages of proceedings.

The tips on the next page are general communication adaptations which may be of assistance:



Do not assume understanding. If you are using a legal term or more complicated vocabulary (e.g. “*Lucas Direction*”, “*compliance*”, “*threshold*”), provide a simple explanation and check understanding with a comprehension question like, “*What is threshold?*”.



Incorporate visual resources and interactive tasks. For example, when trying to gain clear instructions on a series of events, note each stage on a separate post-it note, then work with your client to sequence the events.



Simplify key documents when reading them to clients. Take sections one at a time and simplify terms like “*mitigation*”, “*intent*” and “*consistency*”. Providing a simple summary may be more helpful than overloading your client with more detailed information.



Create ‘easy read’ summaries of important written information. Use short sentences and simple words. Ensure documents are well spaced with clear headings which group key topics. Adding images may also assist. [Learn more about creating easy read documents here.](#)



Ask clients what they find helpful. Some clients will have good insight into their difficulties and be aware of strategies which assist them. For example, being able to move around the room while participating in conferences.



Introduce a topic list at the outset of meetings to explain what will be discussed. This resource can alleviate anxiety and can be used to redirect clients to the current topic, if they become distracted or digressive.



Consider the environment. Choose a quiet, distraction-free space wherever possible and check whether your client requires any adaptations to the setting (e.g. turning off artificial lights, if they have sensory sensitivities).



Implement frequent breaks to allow your client to regulate their emotions, manage their attention and take ‘time out’ from the demands of processing complex verbal information.



Use simple vocabulary and short sentences. Imagine speaking in bullet points.





Intermediary services

If you are concerned about your client's ability to communicate effectively and participate in legal proceedings, Communicourt can help.

We will assess your client to understand their communication needs and how these might affect them in court. Your client does not need to have a diagnosis. Our reports will identify any particular communication issues and make bespoke recommendations to help you and your client throughout proceedings.

If intermediary assistance is recommended, one of our highly trained intermediaries can be there throughout proceedings to facilitate those recommendations.

Intermediaries are mostly funded by HMCTS, with no charges or payments required by legal representatives.

Further reading

From The Access Brief

- [How to create visual aids](#)
- [How to create easy read documents](#)
- [How to support literacy difficulties](#)
- [How to check understanding](#)
- [Supporting emotional regulation](#)
- [Intermediary assessments](#)
- [ADHD in legal proceedings](#)
- [Autism in legal proceedings](#)
- [Learning disability in legal proceedings](#)
- [Traumatic brain injury in legal proceedings](#)
- [Expressive communication difficulties](#)

How to book an intermediary

- 1 Refer online.** Refer your client for an assessment through [our online portal](#) (5 minutes).
- 2 Funding.** We send a quote for you to send to Legal Aid / HMCTS to approve (24 hours).
- 3 Book assessment.** Once funding is approved, please let us know. We will schedule an assessment (2-6 weeks).
- 4 Assessment will** take up to 3 hours and can be conducted in person or remotely. You will then receive a report (7 days).
- 5 Book dates** for hearings or conferences. We will send you booking forms to be signed by the court. Once signed, we will book the intermediary.