

# Parole hearings and communication difficulties



## IMPACT OF COMMUNICATION DIFFICULTIES AT PAROLE HEARINGS

A parole hearing is a hearing to determine whether someone should be released from prison and whether there will be any parole conditions. Their ability to follow discussions, understand questions, 'take in' information and provide clear narratives may affect the outcome of the hearing.

Every individual with a communication difficulty is different, with a unique profile of communication strengths and needs. However, some common difficulties at this stage include:

- **Poor understanding of legal terminology** used at this stage of proceedings such as "indeterminate", "tariff" and "license"
- **Difficulty understanding abstract concepts**, such as "remorse" and "culpability". They may have difficulty discussing topics such as how victims may have felt
- **Poor understanding of time concepts**, for example, the length of a sentence and how much of that sentence will be custodial
- **Difficulty maintaining attention or managing emotions**. These issues may prevent them from engaging with important discussions and information which arises during the hearing, and may be perceived negatively by the board.
- **Difficulty providing a clear narrative**. They may struggle to provide detailed and coherent information about their background or events surrounding the crime
- **Difficulty processing verbal information**. They may struggle to follow and 'take in' longer stretches of complex verbal information

## COMMUNICATION TIPS FOR PROBATION INTERVIEWS

The strategies required to support an individual with communication needs at a parole hearing will vary considerably depending on their communication profile. An [intermediary assessment](#) will provide insight into the person's strengths and difficulties and make bespoke recommendations to support them at all stages of proceedings. The following general tips may be of assistance:

- **Use simple vocabulary and short sentences**. Imagine speaking in bullet points
- **Use direct, single-matter questions**. Start each question with a question word (e.g. *why, where, who, how, did*). Ask about one thing at a time (e.g. "Did you call her?", "Did you text her?" instead of, "Did you call and text her?")
- **Do not assume understanding**. If a legal term or more complicated vocabulary is used, provide a simple explanation and check understanding with a comprehension question like, "What is culpability?". [Learn more about checking understanding here](#)
- **Monitor attention and emotional management**. A break card could be used to allow the individual to request breaks. However, be aware they may struggle to do so independently
- **Use visual resources** to explain abstract concepts. For example, simple stick people with thought bubbles can be used to help the individual reflect on the thoughts and feelings of others affected by their crime
- **Consider allocating an intermediary** to assist. An intermediary can be booked to attend parole hearings at the board's request. Learn more over the page.

Communicourt is the largest Managed and Approved Service Provider of intermediaries for defendants and respondents, in criminal and family courts. We passionately believe that everyone has a right to a fair trial.

## How we can help you



### INTERMEDIARY ASSISTANCE AT PAROLE HEARINGS

An intermediary can be requested to assist before, after and during a parole hearing, to facilitate effective communication as you prepare, present and discuss the outcome of their case.

The strategies the intermediary implements will vary according to your client and their needs. In conferences prior to the hearing, the intermediary may simplify legal terminology, explain complex concepts, produce visual aids, assist with reading and check your clients understanding.

Just before the hearing, an intermediary can participate in a Ground Rules Hearing to discuss adjustments to accommodate your client's communication needs.

During the hearing itself, an intermediary can provide real-time simplification and explanation. In many cases, they will whisper simplifications and summaries to your client, using visual aids or notes, where appropriate. Throughout the hearing, an intermediary can monitor your client's attention, emotional regulation, understanding and participation. They can alert the court to any difficulties your client might be having.

An intermediary can also be booked to attend a conference after the hearing to ensure your client fully understands the outcome decision and any details they need to be aware of.

### REQUESTING AN INTERMEDIARY ASSESSMENT

Before an intermediary can be approved to assist your client, an [intermediary assessment](#) must be conducted.

An intermediary assessment can provide professionals and the parole board with more insight into your client's communication strengths and difficulties, and how these may impact them at a parole hearing.

We compile comprehensive communication reports which identify issues and make bespoke recommendations to help you and your client, even in cases where an intermediary is *not* recommended.

If an intermediary is recommended, one of our highly trained intermediaries can attend proceedings to facilitate those recommendations, meaning you can focus on your job.

Our experience means we can recommend solutions that make a tangible difference and support the parole board in getting a fair result.

#### HOW TO GET SUPPORT



##### BOOK ONLINE

Refer your client for an assessment through our online booking system [communicourt.co.uk](http://www.communicourt.co.uk)

5 minutes

##### FUNDING

We will send you a quote that you need to send to HMCTS and Legal Aid for them to approve funding

24 Hours

##### BOOK THE ASSESSMENT

Once you have funding in place, please let us know. We will then arrange an assessment

4-6 weeks

##### ASSESSMENT

The 3 hour assessment can be carried out in person or remotely. You will then receive a report

7 days

##### BOOK COURT DATES

We will send booking forms which must be signed by the court. Once received we will then book your intermediary

Throughout the trial