

# Communication, Feedback and Management Styles

## How everyday management practices can support or exclude

### Who this information sheet is for?

This information sheet is designed for employers, managers, HR teams and supervisors who want to improve communication and management practices for employees with SEND.

It focuses on everyday interactions — instructions, feedback, meetings and expectations — and how small changes can make a significant difference to confidence, performance and retention.

This sheet can be read on its own or alongside the other SEND information sheets. (see overleaf for details).

### Why communication matters

Communication is one of the most common workplace barriers for people with SEND.

Many difficulties at work do not arise from lack of skill or effort, but from:

- Unclear expectations
- Implied instructions
- Inconsistent feedback
- Assumptions about understanding

When communication is unclear, anxiety increases and performance often suffers.

### Instructions and expectations

Difficulties may arise when:

- Instructions are vague or open-ended
- Priorities change without explanation
- Tasks are given verbally and quickly
- Expectations are assumed rather than stated

This may lead to:

- Over-working or under-working
- Repeated checking
- Avoidance of tasks
- Fear of "getting it wrong"

Clear structure supports confidence and independence.

### Clear communication vs implied communication

Many workplaces rely heavily on implied rules, such as:

- "Use your initiative"
- "You should know what's expected"
- "Just fit in with how we do things"

For people with SEND, this can be challenging.

Clear communication includes:

- Explicit instructions
- Clear priorities and deadlines
- Written follow-up where helpful
- Checking understanding without judgement

Clarity reduces anxiety and supports consistent performance.

### Feedback and performance management

Feedback can be a significant source of stress for employees with SEND.

Challenges often include:

- Indirect or ambiguous feedback
- Feedback given publicly
- Feedback focused on tone or style rather than outcomes
- Lack of clarity about what needs to change

Helpful feedback is:

- Specific
- Timely
- Private
- Focused on behaviours and outcomes
- Balanced with strengths

Clear feedback supports learning rather than triggering anxiety.

## Meetings and social communication

Meetings can be particularly demanding for people with SEND due to:

- Sensory overload
- Fast-paced discussion
- Interruptions
- Unspoken social expectations

Helpful adjustments may include:

- Clear agendas in advance
- Written summaries or action points
- Allowing alternative ways to contribute
- Reducing unnecessary meetings

These approaches benefit many employees, not only those with SEND.

## Small changes, big impact

Effective communication adjustments are often:

- Low-cost
- Easy to implement
- Beneficial to the wider team

Consistency, clarity and predictability reduce stress and improve outcomes across the workforce.

Good communication is not about lowering standards — it is about making expectations accessible.

**"Most people want to do a good job. Clear expectations make that possible."**

## Management style and psychological safety

People perform best when they feel:

- Safe to ask questions
- Able to admit uncertainty
- Confident that mistakes will be handled fairly

Management styles that rely on:

- Pressure
- Assumption
- "Figure it out" approaches

Can unintentionally exclude people with SEND.

Psychological safety supports honesty, learning and retention.

## Key Messages to take away

 **Communication barriers are common and often hidden**

 **Implied expectations increase anxiety**

 **Clear instructions support independence**

 **Feedback should reduce stress, not create it**

 **Good management benefits everyone**

**Clear communication underpins inclusive recruitment, reasonable adjustments, job design and performance management.**

## Next information sheets in this series to explore:

- Inclusive recruitment and reasonable adjustments
- Job design, job carving and job coaching
- Leadership and organisational culture