

# The Communication Questions to Ask

## Four Point Response Format

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Here are some **questions** to ask yourself to better understand how well your communication with a person meets the needs and builds on the strengths of the person's **cognitive abilities**. These questions are based on **brain** functioning and specific cognitive skills. However, you do not need to know anything about the brain or cognition to ask them. These are a few of **many possible** questions.

These questions are organized under ten general **intervention concepts** that address needs a person might frequently experience during interactions with other people.

The questions should be answered with a **particular person** in mind, since each person has different needs, strengths, and desires, and therefore, different ways of communicating. They should also be answered **frequently** enough to accommodate changes in this person's needs, strengths, and desires.

Your answers to these questions can suggest effective **intervention strategies** (that is, support strategies) that adapt your communication with this person to help them more easily think, understand and respond to you, feel more comfortable and competent, and to successfully accomplish a task. These intervention strategies can meet this person's **cognitive needs**, as well as rely on and build on this person's **cognitive strengths**.

The "*CAIS Communication Questions to Ask: Yes/No Response Format*" is an alternative format for answering these questions.

Suggestions of intervention strategies (that is, support strategies) tailored to your responses to these questions can be found in the *Cognitive Abilities and Intervention Strategies (CAIS): Communication Intervention Strategies*.

The **complete CAIS Questions to Ask** and the *CAIS Intervention Strategies* including all **four parts** (with the titles: 1. *Cognitive Abilities*; 2. *Environment*; 3. *Communication*; and 4. *Task and Daily Routines*) with more **detailed instructions, resources**, and other information about the CAIS and related topics are on the Improving MI Practices website at <https://www.improvingmipractices.org>

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Observe** this **person** and **yourself** and your **interactions** while you are assisting this person with a task such as getting dressed, eating, taking a bath or shower, or visiting.
2. **Ask YOURSELF** the following questions. **DO NOT** ask the questions to the person you are observing.
3. The questions assume you are the care partner (that is, caregiver) assisting and communicating with this person. (So you are **observing yourself** while you assist.) If someone else is assisting instead, then you will observe whoever is assisting and ask yourself the questions about whoever is assisting and communicating with this person.
4. Answer each question by selecting a **response** number from 1 - 4 that most closely matches your observations during the **entire time** of the task. **If you don't know the answer** to a question, then try using the intervention strategies identified for that question in the "*CAIS Communication Intervention Strategies*". They can help you better understand the question. These intervention strategies suggest ways you can communicate more easily with this person, even if you and this person communicate well with each other.

A response number of "**3**" or "**4**" suggests your communication strategies may be supporting this person and their desires and meeting, or nearly meeting their cognitive strengths and needs with respect to this question.

A response number of "**1**" or "**2**" alerts you to ways you can help this person understand and respond to you more easily, by directing you to the "*CAIS Communication Intervention Strategies*" where options of specific practical intervention strategies are identified for each question in this "*CAIS Communication Questions to Ask-Four Point Response Format*". These strategies suggest ways you can adapt your communication with this person to support their cognitive abilities and needs. They can also help you understand and respond to this person more easily and in a way that helps you and this person enjoy your interactions and time together.

**Cognitive Abilities and Intervention Strategies (CAIS): Communication Questions to Ask – Four Point Format**

<b>KEY:</b>	1 = Rarely or Never	2 = Sometimes	3 = Often	4 = Usually or Always
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- Record** where indicated your **comments** or specific details about your observations (for example, elaboration, explanations, illustrations, or your thoughts).
- Provide the **information** requested here. The name of the **observer** is **your name**, since you are answering these questions based on your own observations.

Name of observer: \_\_\_\_\_ Name of person being observed: \_\_\_\_\_

Task performed: \_\_\_\_\_ Room person is in: \_\_\_\_\_

Place of observation: \_\_\_\_\_ Other people present and their roles: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of observation: \_\_\_\_\_ Time of observation: *Begin:* \_\_\_\_\_ *AM/PM* *End:* \_\_\_\_\_ *AM/PM*

**I. RESPECT:** Look for ways I:

- Show respect for this person, both verbally and nonverbally
- Treat this person as an adult, both verbally and nonverbally
- Express warmth and gentle friendliness to this person (show that I care about this person), both verbally and nonverbally

A. Do I respect this person? (For example, do I see this person as a valued person? Do I understand this person enough to admire them? Am I free of feelings of impatience, irritation, embarrassment, or disgust?)	1	2	3	4
B. Do I treat this person as an adult in both my words and facial expressions? (For example, do I avoid calling this person “dear” when I don’t really know them?)	1	2	3	4
C. Do I offer normal adult objects and activities? (For example, do I avoid children’s toys or children’s games or objects that look cartoonish or look like they are for children?)	1	2	3	4
D. Do I avoid talking about this person in a condescending way? (For example, do I avoid saying “They are so cute together,” or “She’s the little lady over there”?)	1	2	3	4
E. Do I avoid talking about this person in front of this person?	1	2	3	4
F. Are my voice, gestures, and movements gentle and kind, even when clear and firm?	1	2	3	4
G. Do I help this person save face and avoid embarrassment? (For example, do I avoid calling attention to their mistakes? Do I discreetly correct their mistakes without them noticing?)	1	2	3	4
H. Do I avoid scolding, shaming, or bossing this person?	1	2	3	4
Comments:				

**II. EXPLANATION AND REASSURANCE:** Look for ways I:

- Show reassurance to this person
- Clearly explain events, requests, and the environment to this person

A. Do I give verbal reassurance as often as necessary?	1	2	3	4
B. Do I give nonverbal reassurance as often as necessary?	1	2	3	4
C. Do I avoid giving this person information that would be distressing or embarrassing to them?	1	2	3	4
D. Do I give information or make a request only when this person is emotionally calm and ready to hear me? (So they do not need to feel emotion and think about my words at the same time?)	1	2	3	4
E. Do I give as much explanation as this person needs?	1	2	3	4
F. Do I repeat requests or explanations as often as necessary?	1	2	3	4
G. Are my explanations short, simple, and clear?	1	2	3	4
H. Do I use few words and short phrases and words?	1	2	3	4
I. Do I use familiar words?	1	2	3	4

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J. Do I use concrete words? (For example, do I say “I will help you put your shirt on.” rather than “I will help you get dressed.”?)	1	2	3	4
K. Do I speak clearly?	1	2	3	4
L. Do I speak in a low pitch?	1	2	3	4
M. Do I talk slowly when necessary to allow time for processing?	1	2	3	4
N. Do I use pauses when I talk to allow time for processing and responding?	1	2	3	4
O. Do I wait to talk until there is no other noise?	1	2	3	4
P. Do I give a clear and honest answer to each question this person asks?	1	2	3	4
Q. Do I answer questions as though this is the first time they were asked?	1	2	3	4
R. Do I avoid saying “no” and suggest alternatives instead?	1	2	3	4
S. Does the sound or tone of my voice help convey my meaning? (For example, is it obvious from the pitch of my voice at the end of a sentence that I have asked a question? Or is it obvious that I am trying to soothe by the gentle sound of my voice?)	1	2	3	4
T. Do my questions invite opinions or “yes” and “no” responses, rather than facts or information?	1	2	3	4
U. Do I let this person know what time of day it is, whenever necessary?	1	2	3	4
V. Do I let this person know how much time has passed, whenever necessary?	1	2	3	4
W. Do I tell this person when a task is done?	1	2	3	4
X. Do I verbally prepare this person before touching any part of their body? (For example, by asking permission to touch or by gently informing them verbally?)	1	2	3	4
Y. Do I ask this person to move a part of their body rather than moving it myself?	1	2	3	4
Z. Do I verbally and nonverbally prepare this person before a part of their body moves? (For example, before they or I move a part of their body, do I touch that part of their body, if they are comfortable with touch? Do I ask them to move it? Do I ask permission to move it? Do I inform them it will be moving?)	1	2	3	4
Comments:				

**III. BODY LANGUAGE:** Look for ways I:

- Use my body to communicate with this person
- Unintentionally communicate with my body
- Address this person’s sensory and cognitive abilities by how I position and move my body

A. Do I use my body enough to communicate with this person? (For example, by using facial expressions and hand gestures with my words to help them understand?)	1	2	3	4
B. Is my body telling this person what I want it to say? Do I avoid gestures or facial expressions that could be misinterpreted? (For example, do I raise my eyebrows rather than frown when I want to show concern?)	1	2	3	4
C. Do my body, face, eyes, and words all match? (For example, do I avoid moving too quickly or with startling movements while using soothing words and smiling?)	1	2	3	4
D. Do I place myself so this person sees and notices me easily?	1	2	3	4
E. Do I use gestures when they are helpful and are my gestures slow and small enough?	1	2	3	4
F. Do I change my position only when necessary and do I move slowly and only short distances? (For example, do I move to another spot in the room slowly and only if it helps this person?)	1	2	3	4
G. Am I at eye-level with this person when I interact with them? (For example, sitting near them, or kneeling if their eyes are looking down?)	1	2	3	4
H. Do I make and keep eye contact with this person, if they are comfortable with eye contact?	1	2	3	4
I. Do I touch this person frequently to reassure, comfort, communicate, inform, offer companionship, and orient them, if they are comfortable with my touch? Do I touch in a way that is helpful and comfortable for this person?	1	2	3	4
J. Do I model for this person? (For example, do I do the task myself so they can see me while they are also doing the task? Do I do a task step to show them how to do it before they do it? Am I upbeat and positive?)	1	2	3	4
Comments:				

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**IV. APPROACH:** Look for ways I:

- Introduce a topic, activity, or request in a way that helps this person feel positive about it
- Set an upbeat, cheerful, relaxed, and comfortable emotional tone
- Prevent anxiety, uncertainty, or frustration in this person

A. Do I build trust with this person? (For example, by conversing before mentioning a task such as bathing or getting dressed?)	1	2	3	4
B. Do I avoid embarrassment about private activities? (For example, by inviting this person to use the toilet only when we are alone, so that other people don't hear me ask?)	1	2	3	4
C. Do I avoid telling this person about the whole task, and instead suggest only one step at a time, when appropriate? (For example, instead of saying "Let's take a shower.", do I say "Let's walk to the bathroom.?"?)	1	2	3	4
D. Do I offer options this person can understand, so they can make choices?	1	2	3	4
E. Do I suggest a refreshment or fun enticement to help this person participate?	1	2	3	4
F. Do I rhythmically sing or march to a place when appropriate, to help this person walk and participate? (For example, do I use rhythm when I walk with them to the dining room or bathroom?)	1	2	3	4
G. Do I laugh, joke, and use humor in a concrete and emotionally supportive way?	1	2	3	4
H. Do I stay calm, whatever else is happening? (For example, even when we are being silly together, or when this person is angry or frightened?)	1	2	3	4
Comments:				

**V. OBSERVATION:** Look for ways I notice and recognize:

- How this person is feeling
- How well this person is understanding
- What this person is trying to express
- Evidence this person is going to be frustrated, anxious, angry, or distressed
- Evidence this person may engage in behavior that is distressing to themselves or others
- How to best respond to this person's feelings and behavior

A. Do I watch and listen to this person carefully for nonverbal and verbal feedback, so I can note how this person is feeling and then anticipate or respond to frustration, anxiety, or distress?	1	2	3	4
B. Do I watch this person's whole body for changes that suggest confusion, anxiety, or something else they are feeling? (For example, do I watch for tightening leg muscles, clenching fists, facial grimacing, widening eyes, rapid eye movements, or brief frowns?)	1	2	3	4
C. Do I watch this person's eyes when we talk?	1	2	3	4
D. Does this person seem comfortable and relaxed?	1	2	3	4
E. Is this person responding positively to what I am saying or doing?	1	2	3	4
F. Does this person seem to understand me?	1	2	3	4
G. Do I give this person enough time to absorb what I say and then give them time to respond, so I can more easily observe their feelings and their ability to understand and to perform a task?	1	2	3	4
H. Do I change my own behavior or the environment in response to this person's reactions?	1	2	3	4
Comments:				

**VI. DISTRACTION:** Look for ways I:

- Use distraction or diversion to help this person
- Compensate for and reduce inappropriate distraction for this person

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A. Do I know when distraction or diversion is helpful with this person? (For example, when they repeatedly try to do something that is unsafe, or when they are performing a task that is easier to do when they aren't thinking about it?)	1	2	3	4
B. When there is behavior or a situation that is distressing, do I use humor and diversion instead of demands, argument, shame, or instructions to address the behavior or situation?	1	2	3	4
C. Do I avoid calling this person's attention to their behavior?	1	2	3	4
D. Do I try to identify the feelings behind distressing words and behavior and then respond to the feelings, rather than simply to the words or behavior?	1	2	3	4
E. During tasks, do I encourage this person to hold or use an item while I use a similar item? (For example, a comb while I comb their hair with another comb, or a washcloth while I wash their arm with another washcloth?)	1	2	3	4
F. Do I get this person's attention before speaking, and keep it throughout our interaction?	1	2	3	4
G. Do I reduce distraction such as noise and clutter around me when I am talking to this person?	1	2	3	4
Comments:				

**VII. CONSISTENCY:** Look for ways I:

- Keep my interactions the same and predictable as much as possible
- Have only one care partner (caregiver) at a time interacting with this person

A. Does the same care partner help this person every day as much as possible?	1	2	3	4
B. Does this person know what to expect from me?	1	2	3	4
C. Do I use nearly the same words every time we do this task?	1	2	3	4
D. Do I position myself in the same spot every time we do this task?	1	2	3	4
E. Do I move my body in a similar way every time we do this task?	1	2	3	4
F. Is there only one care partner helping this person at a time?	1	2	3	4
G. If there are two or more care partners, is there only one care partner at a time that this person is noticing and paying attention to? (For example, are the other care partners quietly helping from behind this person, staying out of sight, and not talking?)	1	2	3	4
Comments:				

**VIII. CHARACTERISTICS:** Ask myself:

- Am I the best one to be helping this person with this task?
- Are there things I can change about myself to make this go more easily?
- Are there things I cannot change and therefore must address in some way?
- How do I feel about this person and about this task?

A. Does this person recognize me as myself and not someone else?	1	2	3	4
B. Does this person feel comfortable with me or with whoever they think I am?	1	2	3	4
C. Does this person trust me?	1	2	3	4
D. Is my gender comfortable and appropriate for this person?	1	2	3	4
E. Is this person comfortable with all of my characteristics? (For example, with my age, my size, my appearance, the sound of my voice, the language I use, my skin color, my ethnicity?)	1	2	3	4
F. Am I comfortable with this person in general?	1	2	3	4
G. Am I comfortable with this person today?	1	2	3	4
H. Am I comfortable doing this task with this person? (For example, am I comfortable seeing this person without clothes on or drooling while eating?)	1	2	3	4
I. Am I comfortable with this person's dependency?	1	2	3	4
J. Can I avoid letting my distress (such as my anger or sadness) about this person's behavior affect my ability to help?	1	2	3	4
Comments:				

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**IX. ORGANIZATION:** Look for ways I:

- Organize my time, the task steps, and the task items
- Am efficient, but appear relaxed and calm to this person
- Focus more on this person than on the task or product

A. Do I organize my time to avoid the need to rush through a task?	1	2	3	4
B. Do I plan the task steps ahead of time?	1	2	3	4
C. Do I do most of the task preparation out of this person’s sight? (For example, collecting and arranging the task items before this person arrives or where they cannot see or hear me?)	1	2	3	4
D. Do I stay out of this person’s sight when I do those parts of the task this person is not directly involved in, so the task is less fatiguing, confusing, or distressing? (For example, do I rinse out the wash cloth or put the toothpaste on the tooth brush where this person doesn’t see or hear me doing it?)	1	2	3	4
E. Do I move quickly and quietly when I am out of this person’s sight, but more slowly on the parts of the task where this person sees or hears me?	1	2	3	4
F. Do I focus more on this person and less on the task or product? (For example, do I focus more on ensuring this person is comfortable and content than I do on getting the task done completely or quickly?)	1	2	3	4
Comments:				

**X. PREVENTION:** Look for ways I:

- Prevent distress, confusion, or anger, rather than simply respond when they occur

A. Do I prevent distress or confusion? Do I prevent distress or confusion from escalating by addressing it immediately when it begins?	1	2	3	4
B. Do I apologize or reassure immediately when I see this person beginning to get angry or anxious?	1	2	3	4
C. Do I notice subtle hesitations and try to gently coax or encourage this person when they are performing a task?	1	2	3	4
Comments:				