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Tips for a National Relay Service Call

Communicating on the phone can be hard for a person with a communication disability. It can also be hard for the person receiving the call.

The National Relay Service (NRS) offers an additional way for a person with a communication disability (or a hearing impairment) to make a call.

The most common type of NRS call is called a 'Speak and Listen Call'. A call made in this way involves three people: The caller with a communication disability, the person or staff member they call, and a NRS relay officer who is part of the call and will support you if you have difficulty understanding the caller.

What happens when you receive a NRS call?

The relay officer:

- Will introduce themselves and inform you this is an NRS call.
- May provide you with some information about the caller, for example: 'I have John Smith on the line. John is using a communication device. He can understand everything you say, so please speak as you usually would.'
- May ask: 'Have you ever received a call via the NRS before?' (If no, they will explain the process to you.)
- The conversation will start when the relay officer says, 'Go ahead John.'

The staff member:

- Should talk directly to the caller, ignoring the presence of the relay officer.
- Should NOT talk to the relay officer and say 'Tell John...'
- If you do not understand the caller you can:
 - Ask the caller to repeat what they said.
 - Clarify what you think you have heard and ask, 'Is this correct?'
- If you still cannot understand after a few attempts, the NRS relay officer will step in to help.
- Then, continue talking directly to the caller.

Remember:

1. Always talk to the caller and NOT the relay officer.
2. The caller can hear everything you say to the relay officer or anyone else in your environment, so be respectful at all times.

All the tips for a regular call apply to an NRS call

Be welcoming and friendly

- Be respectful.
- Be relaxed.
- Speak naturally. You don't have to talk loudly or slowly.

Give the person enough time

- Give the caller plenty of time to respond. Waiting for long periods of time is okay.
- Do not interrupt while the person is talking or typing their message.
- If there is long silence:
 - Reassure the caller that you are still there and waiting for their response.
 - Don't fill the silence with more questions.
 - Wait for a response.

Don't make assumptions

- Avoid making assumptions about the caller, such as:
 - The caller doesn't understand you.
 - The caller has an intellectual disability.
 - The caller is not capable of handling the call
- Avoid being patronising in the way you speak

Make your language easy to understand

- Talk in short, clear sentences.
- Pause between sentences.
- Ask one question at a time and wait for a reply.
- Talk about one thing at a time.
- Use simple words.
- Summarise key pieces of information at appropriate moments.

If you don't understand the caller:

- Politely tell the caller that you did not understand.
- Don't pretend to understand. It's ok to say 'I didn't understand that. Can you tell me again?'
- Ask the caller to repeat or to tell you in another way. For example:
 - use their device if they have one.
 - spell out a word.
 - just say one word at a time.
- Ask questions that the caller can answer with a yes or no.
- Check back that you have understood correctly.

The relay officer will help if you still can't understand - that's where the NRS is so helpful.

Consider background noise

- Move to a quieter place if possible.
- Turn off the radio or television.
- Inform staff around you if you need a quiet environment.

At the end of the call:

- Be certain the person has the information they need before you hang up.
- Ask if the caller:
 - 'Have you got any other questions?'
 - 'Can I help you with anything else today?'

If you would like to know more about communication access, please contact Scope's Communication and Inclusion Resource Centre

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