



Understanding Me

To support people well, it is vital that we understand each person as a unique individual. This person has their own way of expressing their needs, which might include communicating through different behaviours.

We need to understand how each person's experiences have shaped their needs and acknowledge that as people grow, develop and age, their ideas about what they want in life may also change (Carr et al., 2002).

One tool that we can use in getting to know people better is the "Understanding Me" tool (the Tool).

The Tool shows how the person's needs interlink with the capability of an organisation to implement supports matched to that person's needs.



Caption: The image above illustrates the multiple layers that need to be considered to provide effective and sustainable support to a person.

Person's needs

The Tool starts by exploring the person's needs including those related to communication, connection and interaction, belonging, self-determination, autonomy, choice, processing, orientation and predictability, health, sensory, meaningful engagement and self-worth.

A holistic approach and collaboration with the person and key supporters are important to obtain a comprehensive, shared understanding of that person and their needs.

For example, when exploring the person's need for self-determination, autonomy and choice, you may want to discuss:

- How much autonomy does the person have now? How can this be increased?
- How can they be better supported to make their own decisions about their life, home, finances, work/study, friendships, goals and dreams?
- How does the person make choices throughout their day?
- How involved are they in planning what will happen, when and how long, and with whom (e.g. in their daily routines and activities, who would they want to support them)?
- How will they choose where and whom to live with, communicate about their choices and preferences, and know what choices are available?

At different times in their life, a person may place high priority on a certain situation or incident, e.g. a particular need related to moving out of home or related to a health crisis. It is important to adopt a lifetime perspective when exploring the various areas of a person's needs, being mindful of past experiences as well as life stages.

Person-centred supports

Once we better understand the person's needs, the next question is: "What can we do or put in place to meet these needs?"

This shows we are using our knowledge about the person to put in place practical supports and strategies that are matched to the person's unique needs.

Support team's / organisation's needs

It is also important to meet the needs of the people who provide supports to that person.

The support team may include family members, friends, carers, support workers, medical/allied health team, etc.

This is part of "building a capable environment"¹ to ensure this group can provide effective supports to the person.

Questions to consider may include:

- What does the team need to put these supports in place for the person?
- What tailored training does the support team need so they can meet the person's needs?
- How will the support team collaborate with the person and with each other to keep improving ways of meeting the person's needs?
- How can the supervisor of a disability support organisation help their support team members so they can better meet the person's needs?

¹ [Authorisation of restrictive practices resources](#) ARP Bulletins 10, 13 and 14

- How do organisational policies/procedures support a person-centred approach? How can these policies/procedures be applied to help the support team meet the person's needs?

The Understanding Me tool illustrates the multiple layers that need to be considered to provide effective and sustainable support to a person.

It should be used to prompt thinking and planning to implement Positive Behaviour Support and reduce/eliminate the use of restrictive practices.