Challenging Behaviour Associated with Frustration Due to Communication Difficulties

'Her language is very poor. She does have very little communication. That is the one thing that gets her cross - when people can't understand her'

Sometimes we may see challenging behaviour occurring when an individual has good receptive language skills (understanding of language) but poor expressive communication skills (ability to speak, use signs, etc.). This is because this uneven profile of abilities makes an individual less able to communicate effectively with other people.

The use of the word ‘effectively’ is critical here as frustrations may often occur when the person is misunderstood or is unable to fully articulate (pronounce clearly) what they mean to other people.

Managing challenging behaviour associated with frustration related to communication difficulties

1. It is crucial to ensure that individuals have an effective form of communication.
2. For communication to be effective, it needs to be something that can be understood by everybody.
3. Using signs and symbols to support verbal communication is vital for those with articulation difficulties. Even if you and other familiar people can understand the person’s speech, it is important to encourage methods that are effective in all environments and with all individuals.
4. It is imperative that any non-verbal communication system can ‘keep up’ with the person’s verbal language skills. If the person you care for finds that Makaton or PECS symbols are not sophisticated or quick enough for their level of verbal and receptive language, use a more complex signing system such as British Sign Language or some other communication device that can be used quickly and extensively.
5. Early intervention of speech and language therapy is crucial for all individuals with intellectual disability.

NEXT: Challenging behaviour occurring in specific settings