

# **Approaching Adults With Low-level Reading Skills**

*Source: East Texas Literacy Council*

## **Obstacles to Communication**

Authority figures, suits and ties, eye contact, rushed and stressed staff, institutions, offices, a foreign language, wealth, educated people, forms, any new environment.

## **Opening Comfort Lines**

"Let me know if you need any help."

"A lot of people say that this is a difficult form to fill out."

"I'm sorry about all this paperwork."

"If you have any problem understanding this, let me know."

"Would you like someone to explain this information to you?"

"Do the best you can with this form."

"Take your time with reading the information. I can explain what you don't finish, and if you have any questions, just let me know."

"Let me help you with that form."

"They could make these forms easier for people to understand."

## **Opening Approach Lines**

"A lot of people need help with reading and writing."

"Fortunately there are programs that help people with reading and writing."

"I send a lot of people to free reading programs that help them improve their basic reading and writing skills."

"Here's a card for programs that help people improve their reading, writing, and math."

"There are programs that help people improve in understanding, speaking, reading and writing English."

"There are programs that help people with their spelling and writing."

"There are programs that help parents help their children with their homework and that help parents read better."

"There are programs that will help you with the things you need to do in your job, including job reports."

## **How to Recognize Low Reading Adults with Low Reading Skills**

### **Excuses:**

"I don't have time to fill out this form today. Can I bring it back tomorrow?"

"I don't have time to read this right now. Could you just tell me what it says?"

"My husband/wife does all the paperwork in our family."

"I hurt my hand so I'll need some help filling out this form."

"I forgot my glasses. I can't read this now."

"My handwriting is bad."

"Reading out loud makes me nervous."

"My spelling is awful."

"I just visited the doctor, and he put drops in my eyes, so I can't read very well."

**Situations or reactions:**

Client becomes very aggressive when a form appears.

Client shows signs of tension when confronted with reading or writing tasks.

Client walks out when a form or other reading materials appear.

Forms come back always filled out the same way or filled out incorrectly.

Client does not respond to things sent through the mail.

Client asks for directions when they are clearly written on a sign or on a form.

Client comes to interview with another person.

Client does not follow directions. Examples may include not making appointments, being late for appointments, not filling medicine prescriptions, not taking prescribed medicine, or taking wrong doses of medicine.

Client shows no interest in reading important information.

Client may observe others before proceeding.

He/she will take written forms home to complete.

Client may not have a checking account, instead using cash or money orders for purchases and bills.

In general, client may appear to be uncooperative.

***REMEMBER: ANY OF THESE "DANGER SIGNALS" MIGHT MEAN SOMETHING ELSE, OR THEY MIGHT MEAN NOTHING.***

## Counseling Adults with Low Level Literacy Skills

### **DON'Ts**

Don't treat this as a crisis.

Don't suggest that the client needs to "learn to read."

Don't expect the client to know what "one-to-one" reading help is.

### **DOs**

Be matter of fact.

Emphasize that this is a common problem.

Stress the fact that the client is a competent person with many skills and abilities.

Make it clear that you do not consider it the client's fault that he/she can't read.

Stress that the client "needs help with reading."

Make sure the client knows exactly what will happen when he/she calls the Literacy Hotline or a literacy program.

Make sure the client knows what to say when he/she calls.

## Writing to Low Level Readers

1. Forget "business speak" -- write it like you would say it, in short, natural sentences.
2. Limit your letter to one or two main thoughts, and say only what you need to about those items.
3. Use simple words that look like they sound whenever possible:  
    need to talk to you **not** anxious to talk to you  
    want a meeting **not** desire a meeting  
    please call **not** please respond
4. Leave lots of white space around your words; double space where possible.