



# Consider Understanding

**What does the person understand?**

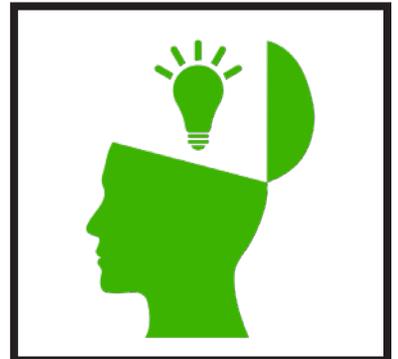
**Can they follow directions?**

**Do they laugh when everyone else is laughing?**

**Will they answer questions?**

**Do they understand pictures? Signs? Symbols?**

**Writing? Sign language? Spoken words?**



As listeners, we go through several steps to understanding what someone says. First, we must be able to use our senses to perceive the message. Sensory deficits, such as vision loss or hearing impairment can impact understanding.

Provided we perceive the message, we need to be able to interpret it and break down its structure and analyze what the combination of words mean—the function of the message. For example, is it a greeting, a comment, or a question? Word endings may tell us whether the action takes place now, or in the past. An “s” tells us about one or more.

As our brain processes structural clues, we get the surface meaning. **But there is more nuanced, social meaning behind what someone says in the actual meaning of the language.** Sarcasm, for example, is a

mismatch of the words and attitude—conveying attitude through body language, or tone of voice. Every person does this—whether they speak or not. Hearing, listening and understanding happen with or without speech abilities. **Not being able to speak does NOT mean that someone doesn't understand.** People who don't speak often understand more than we think.

**A person's reaction allow us to deduce their ability to understand.** Indicators include eye gaze, posture, or even breathing—maybe blink their eyes to indicate yes and no.

People generally understand a lot more than they can say. We don't know how much someone understands if they can't express. Giving a person a tool/method to communicate has the potential to help further grow receptive skills. **The acts of expressing and understanding are interconnected.**