

COMMUNICATION TIPS WHEN TALKING WITH OR ABOUT PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

General Tips

- When introduced to a person with a disability, it is appropriate to offer to shake hands.
- If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted. Then listen to or ask for instructions.
- Treat adults as adults.
- Use "People First" language such as "person who is blind" versus "the blind person."
- Speak directly to person.
- Relax. Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use common expressions such as "See you later," or "Did you hear about that?" that seem to relate to a person's disability.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions when you're unsure of what to do.

Individuals with Mobility Impairments

- Sit when speaking for long periods of time.
- Do not lean on someone's chair or sit in it.
- Offer to shake hands, even when the person is missing a hand.
- Offer assistance with opening doors or other tasks.

Individuals with Visual Impairments or Blindness

- Use name first.
- Don't lead without permission.
- Tell person when leaving.
- Be descriptive.

Individuals with Speech Impairments

- If you do not understand, don't pretend.
- Ask to repeat, using different words or by re-phrasing.
- Offer alternative means to communicate, such as writing.
- Ask questions requiring short responses.

Individuals with Learning Disabilities

- Ask best way to communicate and offer alternatives.
- Be prepared to repeat and rephrase questions and responses.

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Individuals with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities

- Treat age appropriately.
- Use short phrases.
- Ask questions with a set of responses to choose from.
- Minimize distractions.

Individuals who are Deaf

- When using interpreter, do not address interpreter; directly address person who is deaf.
- Offer other means of communication (i.e., interpreter, TTY, written notes).
- Ask what effective means of communication person would suggest using.

Individuals who are Hard of Hearing

- Get person's attention before speaking.
- Speak in normal tone.
- Look at person when speaking.
- When repeating, use different words.

Service Animals

- Do not distract or pet while on duty.
- Ensure allowed in public places. It's the law.
- Can expect obedience from service animals.

Parents, Caregivers and Advocates

- Speak to person with a disability directly, not their advocate or parent.
- Offer helping hand but do not be offended if offer declined.
- Don't make assumptions or judgments.
- Don't offer unsolicited advice.

Information for this fact sheet came from the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP); the Media Project, Research and Training Center on Independent Living, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS; and the National Center for Access Unlimited, Chicago, IL.