

Communication tips

We all face some kind of stereotype. Getting past the easy assumptions and getting comfortable with a person's disability is half the battle.

Some general considerations for disability etiquette ...

People with disabilities are entitled to the same courtesies as everyone else. This includes their personal privacy. If you don't generally ask people about personal information, then don't ask people with disabilities about theirs.

Treat adults as adults.

Call a person by his or her first name only when extending this familiarity to everyone present.

Offer assistance to a person with a disability if you feel like it, but wait until your offer is accepted BEFORE you help, and listen to any instructions the person may give.

Be considerate of the extra time it might take for a person with a disability to get things done or said. Let the person set the pace in walking and talking.

When planning events involving persons with disabilities, consider their needs ahead of time. If an insurmountable barrier exists, let them know about it prior to the event. They may have great ideas in solving the problem.

In Conversation ...

When talking with someone who has a disability, speak directly to that person rather than through a companion.

Tips for improving your communication with and about persons with disability:

- Speak of the person first, then the disability (e.g., Susan, who is deaf ...).

- Emphasize abilities, not limitations.
- Do not label people as part of a disability group.
- Don't patronize an individual with a disability by using excessive praise or attention.
- Let the person make choices and speak for him/herself, as much as possible.
- Relax. Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use accepted, common expressions, such as "See you later" or "Got to be running along," that seem to relate to the person's disability.

Employees Who Have Difficulty Hearing ...

To get the attention of a person who has a hearing disability, tap the person on the shoulder or wave your hand.

Look directly at the person and speak clearly, slowly, and expressively to establish if the person can read your lips. Not all persons with hearing impairments can lip-read. Those who do will rely on facial expressions and other body language to help in understanding. Show consideration by placing yourself facing the light source and keeping your hands and food away from your mouth when speaking. Shouting won't help. Written notes will.

For some individuals with a hearing impairment, communication can be facilitated through the use of a sign language interpreter.

Employees Who Have Difficulty Seeing ...

When greeting a person with a severe loss of vision, always identify yourself and others who may be with you. For example, say, "On my right is Penelope Potts." When conversing in a group, remember to say the name of the person to whom you are speaking to give a vocal cue. Speak in a normal tone of voice, indicate when you move from one place to another, and let it be known when the conversation is at an end.

Use specifics, such as "left a hundred feet," or "right two yards," when directing a person with a visual impairment.

When you offer to assist someone with a vision impairment, allow the person to take your arm.

Employees Who Have Difficulty Speaking ...

Give whole, unhurried attention when you're talking to a person who has difficulty speaking. Keep your manner encouraging rather than correcting. Be patient and resist the temptation to speak for the person.

When necessary, ask short questions that require short answers or a nod or shake of the head.

Never pretend to understand if you are having difficulty doing so. Repeat what you understand. The person's reaction will clue you in and guide you to understanding.