



# Effective Communication:

## Tips for Interacting with People with Disabilities

People with disabilities are more than their conditions. Remember these tips to help you treat all people with respect and dignity during conversations and interactions.

**1. Consider language preferences.**

Person-first language acknowledges the person before the disability. For example, “person with a disability” instead of “disabled person” or “handicapped.” Identity-first language expresses the disability first (i.e., Deaf person). When in doubt, ask the person’s preference.

**2. Talk directly to the person.**

When talking with anyone who has a disability, speak directly to the person rather than to their interpreter or companion. To get the attention of someone with hearing loss, tap them on the shoulder or wave your hand. Make eye contact and speak clearly, at a normal rate, and expressively.

**3. Use acceptable greetings.**

When meeting a person with a disability, it is appropriate to offer a handshake. People with limited hand use or who wear a prosthetic limb can usually shake hands. When necessary, offering the left hand or a verbal greeting is acceptable.

**4. Introduce everyone.**

When greeting someone with vision loss, always identify yourself and others with you. Also, remember to identify yourself before speaking when talking in a group or a virtual meeting.

**5. Speak clearly and appropriately.**

People with disabilities deserve to be treated with the same respect as anyone else. Take care not to be patronizing or condescending. Don’t pat, use baby talk, shout, or assume the person doesn’t understand what you’re saying.

## 6. Practice patience.

When interacting with someone who has difficulty communicating, listen attentively and wait patiently for them to finish. Avoid interjecting, correcting, or finishing the person's sentences. And never pretend to understand. Instead, restate what you understood and give them time to respond, politely asking follow-up questions if needed.

## 7. Ask before you assist.

When offering to help an individual with a disability, wait until they accept the offer before doing anything so they have an opportunity to act independently.

## 8. Don't touch personal items.

All assistive devices including canes, wheelchairs, crutches, communication boards, and service animals should be treated as an extension of the person. Don't touch or lean on these personal items without the owner's permission. And don't pet service animals or distract them in any way.

## 9. Show discretion.

Curiosity may be natural, but it's never ok to be nosey. People with disabilities have the same right to privacy as anyone else, so refrain from asking medical or other deeply personal questions that could pressure someone to share private or sensitive information.

## 10. Relax.

It's not necessary to be embarrassed if you happen to use common expressions that could seem to relate to a person's disability, like "Do you see what I mean?" or "Did you hear about this?"



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