

Supporting people with a hearing impairment

- To get the person's attention, place yourself where the person can see you
- Make sure the person is looking at you when you speak to them
- Be aware of room or window lighting and position yourself to ensure maximum light on your face
- Look directly at the person and speak clearly, especially if the person wishes to lip-read. Do not exaggerate lip movements or put your hand over your mouth while speaking. Be aware facial hair can sometimes make it difficult for people to lip-read
- Be flexible. If the person does not understand something you say, reword it instead of repeating it. Use notes or visual expressions/ clues to illustrate what you are saying
- Reduce unnecessary background noise – this can interfere with hearing aids and make communication difficult

- Do not shout. It may not be necessary or appropriate. Ask if the person is able to hear you
- Ask short clear questions that require only short answers if possible
- Do not refer to a person who is deaf or has a hearing impairment as "deaf/dumb". Some people who are deaf or have a hearing impairment can speak; others are "nonverbal" and use sign language
- Relax and do not be embarrassed if you use terms like "Did you hear about..."
- Make sure the person has understood you. If necessary write it down
- If there is a sign language interpreter present, face the person with the hearing impairment when talking, not the interpreter
- In a group, speak one at a time and ensure you have eye contact before speaking

Supporting people who have a vision impairment

Do not shout. Vision problems and hearing loss are not necessarily related impairments

- When meeting, identify yourself and others with you
- Do not pat or touch a guide dog while it is in the harness. The animal is working and distractions for the dog may cause harm to its owner
- When conversing in a group address people by name
- If you know the person's name, address the person by their name so that they realise they are being spoken to
- Offer assistance if it appears necessary but pay attention to the person's response – take your cues from him or her
- Be specific with verbal directions to places, and avoid comments like, "Over there ...". Direct the person who has vision impairment to their left or right, not yours
- Do not presume that the person cannot see anything. If appropriate it is OK to ask what they can see
- When preparing printed information, for a person with low vision it is best to seek their advice for their preferred format for personal documents. General printed information should be in font size at least 16pt and preferably in a plain font (for example Arial). Avoid using coloured paper
- The lighting needs of people with vision loss differ and may be significant. Many people see much more with stronger light and others do not. The most common concern is glare
- Walk alongside and slightly ahead of the person. Allow the person to take your arm if they need assistance. Do not hold onto the person's arm without permission
- Avoid revolving doors. On stairs or on escalators, assist the person by putting his or her hand on the railing. It is important that the person is made aware the stairs or an escalator is going up or down. Always give the person a choice of using stairs, an escalator or a lift. Do not leave doors ajar. Close them or open them fully
- When seating a person with a vision impairment put their hand on the back of their chair and they will then be able to seat themselves
- If necessary orientate a person with vision impairment to the surrounding environment, for example the reception desk, so they feel more secure
- Do not relocate objects or furniture without telling the person with vision impairment
- Use words such as "look" and "see"; they are part of everyone's vocabulary. Otherwise both you and the person with vision impairment will feel awkward



Supporting people with cognitive impairment

A cognitive impairment is a disability which affects a person's ability to process information. It may be due to an intellectual disability which a person was born with or it may be due to an acquired brain injury like a stroke or injury to the head. People with a cognitive impairment vary greatly in their abilities, so always respond to the individuals needs rather than making assumptions about their abilities.

- Speak directly to the person with the disability, not to a person who is assisting him or her
- BE PATIENT
- Make instructions clear and brief, but do not be condescending – all people deserve your respect. Do not get frustrated if you have to repeat yourself
- Do not be afraid to ask the person to repeat something if you do not understand
- Pay attention, particularly if the person has a speech impairment. Do not complete sentences for him or her

Communicating or supporting people with autism spectrum disorders

- Say what you mean. Avoid using ambiguous language (example sarcasm or jokes). People with autism spectrum disorders often have a literal understanding of language. For example, if you use the expression "Hold your horses", the person may respond by asking "Where are the horses?"
- Communicate one idea at a time
- Be patient. Give the person time to answer
- Speak in a normal tone of voice, stating your message clearly, concisely and concrete as possible
- Give specific choices rather than asking open ended questions
- Some people with autism spectrum disorder may find it difficult to look at you and listen to you at the same time

Remember when interacting with people

- Everybody uses a variety of ways to communicate with different people.
- People with disabilities also need different ways to communicate with different people.
- Consider each environment and the communication needs in each environment.
- Never ignore the vital reality that we are all people first. Quite simply, people with disabilities do not want their disability to become the defining aspect of their life.

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In research, writing and reporting, coverage of people with a disability is often long on emotion and inspiration but short on issues.



Accessibility means access for all.

Positive portrayal of people with a disability involves presenting them as individuals with a variety of qualities.

Words and actions Matter: Interacting with people with a disability

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Words and Actions Matter: Interacting with people with a disability

Each person's experience of disability is different. It is influenced by the person's own experience of their individual disability, the attitudes of others towards their disability, how much the community values the differences between people, and how easy it is for a person to access their physical environment, information and services.

How to act towards people with disability sometimes causes confusion, especially when it is unfamiliar. The most appropriate terminology, "person with a disability" puts the emphasis on the person, not the disability. When interviewing or speaking, socialising or meeting people with disability, the following common courtesies are offered as helpful hints to put everyone at ease.

Above all, be respectful, polite and considerate, offer assistance, communicate effectively and do not hesitate to ask questions.

Treat all people the same way you wish to be treated.



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Stereotypes can lead to discrimination as they take away a person's individuality.

Language and disability

When referring to people with a disability, avoid using references that potentially depersonalise, label or limit the individual. Language is critical in shaping and reflecting our thoughts, beliefs, feelings and concepts.

SAY:

- ✔ Person with a disability
- ✔ Person with cerebral palsy
- ✔ Vision impairment
- ✔ Person with a physical disability
- ✔ Person who uses a wheelchair
- ✔ Person with a hearing impairment, hearing loss, person who is deaf
- ✔ Accessible parking, accessible toilets, etc.

AVOID SAYING:

- ✘ Victim, suffers from, deformed
- ✘ Afflicted by / with
- ✘ Blind / can't see
- ✘ Crippled, the crippled, crippling, invalid
- ✘ Wheelchair bound, confined to a wheelchair
- ✘ Deaf and dumb, deaf mute
- ✘ Disabled toilets, handicapped Parking, etc.

People with a disability may have terminology preferences that should be respected.

Communicating with people with a disability

DO:

- ✔ Refer to adults with a disability in the same way you would refer or address any other adult under the same circumstance or situation.
- ✔ Ask the person the best way to communicate if you are unsure.
- ✔ Face and speak directly to the person rather than through the companion/attendant/sign language interpreter who may also be present.
- ✔ Offer assistance if it appears necessary, but do not assume a person with a disability needs or will accept it. Wait for acceptance and instruction before proceeding. Remember that not everyone will want or need assistance, and their wishes should be respected.
- ✔ Extend your hand to shake when meeting someone.

DO NOT:

- ✘ Don't tell an individual you admire his/her courage or determination. Don't put people with a disability on a pedestal or talk to them in patronising terms as if performing normal, everyday activities were exceptional (e.g. "Oh, do you cook your own meals? How amazing!")
- ✘ Don't stare at or avoid looking at a visible disability.
- ✘ Don't express sympathy for the individual because they have a disability.
- ✘ Don't assume someone with a speech or hearing impediment is intellectually impaired.
- ✘ Don't presume the individual is more fragile or sensitive than others.

Supporting people with physical disability

- If a person is using a wheelchair, where possible, be seated so the person does not have to look up. Communicate at eye level with the person
- Speak directly to the person and not with someone who maybe assisting them
- Do not shout. Deafness and physical disability are not related
- Never patronise people who use wheelchairs by patting them on the head or shoulder
- Ensure that there is a clear pathway to intended destinations and at meetings or restaurants. Make a chair-free space at the table for the person using the wheelchair to sit
- Push the person in the wheelchair only when asked. Do not take control without asking
- When assisting in going up or down a kerb, ask the person if they prefer going backwards or forwards
- Be prepared – learn the locations of ramps and accessible facilities
- Never lean on a person's wheelchair or tray – the chair is part of one's personal body space and this can be very annoying and offensive
- Never presume that a person who is non-verbal does not understand what you are saying, they may require the assistance of a communication aid, for example: picture communication board, talking device



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A ramp that makes a doorway accessible helps people using wheelchairs, or who have recently had surgery or injury, as well as people pushing strollers or delivering items in trolleys.

Supporting people with a speech impairment

Do not presume that a person who is non-verbal does not understand what you are saying. Some people may have difficulty understanding speech, but many do not.

- Do not raise your voice, they are not deaf
- Talk in a quiet environment if possible
- Be patient and do not take over the conversation because you are afraid you won't understand the person speaking
- Do not pretend you have understood if you have not
- Do not be afraid to ask the person to repeat themselves, they know their speech is hard to understand
- Ask the person to say it using different words if you cannot understand
- Ask if they can give you a clue to the subject or spell a word. (They may have a communication aid)
- If a person is using an electronic communication aid stand in front of the person and refrain from reading over their shoulder as they type
- Ask if there is someone close by who may be able to interpret for you
- Acknowledge if you have not been successful despite all efforts and ask whether the message was urgent



Interacting with people with a disability

Words and Actions Matter:

