

Ten Key Points for Communicating with People with Disabilities

1 | Speak directly.

Speak directly to the individual with a disability rather than through a companion or sign language interpreter who may be present.



5 | Treat adults as adults.

Address people with disabilities by their first names only when extending that same familiarity to all others. Never patronize people in wheelchairs by patting them on the head or shoulder.



8 | Place yourself at eye level when speaking with someone in a wheelchair or on crutches.



2 | Offer to shake hands when introduced.

People with limited hand use or an artificial limb can usually shake hands and offering the left hand is an acceptable greeting.



6 | Do not lean against or hang on someone's wheelchair.

Bear in mind that people with disabilities treat their chairs as extensions of their bodies. And so do people with guide dogs and help dogs. Never distract a work animal from their job without the owner's permission. Titles II and III of the ADA makes it clear that service animals are allowed in public facilities and accommodations.



9 | Tap a person who is deaf or hard of hearing on the shoulder or wave your hand to get his or her attention.

Look directly at the person and speak clearly, slowly, and expressively to establish if the person can read your lips. If so, try to face the light source and keep hands, cigarettes and food away from your mouth when speaking. If a person is wearing a hearing aid, don't assume that they have the ability to discriminate your speaking voice. Never shout at a person. Just speak in a normal tone of voice.



3 | Always identify yourself and others who may be with you when meeting someone with a visual disability.

When conversing in a group, remember to identify the person to whom you are speaking.



7 | Listen attentively when talking with people who have difficulty speaking and wait for them to finish.

If necessary, ask short questions that require short answers, or a nod of the head. Never pretend to understand; instead repeat what you have understood and allow the person to respond.



10 | Relax.

Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use common expressions, such as "See you later" or "Did you hear about this?" that seem to relate to a person's disability.



4 | If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted.

Then listen or ask for instructions.

