



Avoiding miscommunication with disabled people

- Be matter-of-fact in inviting people to disclose if they have any impairment needs you can assist with. Be responsive to those who do choose to disclose.
- Refer to a person's impairment only if it is relevant to the conversation.
- Avoid defining someone by their impairment or by the equipment they use.
- Avoid assuming you understand a person's impairment. Even if you or someone you know has a similar condition, ask the person what it means for them.
- If you are having difficulty understanding someone, it is OK to ask them to repeat what they've said. Avoid giving up or saying you understand when you don't. Find another way e.g. write it down.
- If you are not being understood, try to rephrase your thoughts rather than repeat the same words. Short sentences can be easier to understand.
- Some people take longer to express themselves. Allow extra time to check you understand each other.
- Ask a person with a disability if they need help before helping.
- Talk directly to the person, not through their support person or companion. If a sign language interpreter is being used, face the Deaf person and speak clearly. The interpreter will translate exactly what you and the Deaf person are saying.
- When guiding people with vision impairments; allow the person to take your arm so that they 'feel' you approach stairs, doorways or other obstacles and be descriptive, say "The chair is directly to your right," rather than "The chair is over there."
- Always ask permission before you interact with a person's assistance dog.
- Avoid perpetuating negative social stereotypes. A person uses a wheelchair rather than being confined by it, or wheelchair bound. Someone may have an impairment, but do not assume they suffer from it.
- If you are communicating about disabled people show them as ordinary people in society and avoid creating an impression of separateness or specialness.