



How to communicate with, and about, disabled people

- ▶ Be matter-of-fact in asking the person if they have a disability that would be helpful for you to know about. If they do, ask them if they have any specific needs and be responsive to those (within reason of course).
- ▶ Every person's experience of a disability is unique so avoid assuming you understand the person's disability, even if you know someone with a similar disability or if you have a similar disability. Ask them.
- ▶ If you are having difficulty understanding someone, for example due to a speech impairment, 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.
- ▶ Avoid defining someone by their disability or by the equipment they use.
- ▶ Some people take longer to express themselves. Allow extra time to check you understand each other.
- ▶ Always ask permission before you interact with a person's guide or service dog. The dog is working when the harness, jacket or special leash is on.
- ▶ 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, be descriptive, say "The chair is directly to your right," rather than, "The chair is over there".
- ▶ Avoid perpetuating negative social stereotypes. For example, say a person uses a wheelchair rather than being confined by it, or wheelchair bound. Or, someone may have a disability, but they neither suffer from it, nor are they afflicted by it.
- ▶ If you are communicating about disabled people, show them as ordinary people in society and avoid creating an impression of separateness or specialness.
- ▶ If you are not being Understood, try to rephrase your thoughts rather than repeat the same words. Short sentences can be easier to understand. Put the important words into writing.
- ▶ Ask a person with disability if they need help before helping.