

Friendship Companion Training

Communication

Communication with people with disabilities

People with disabilities are – first and foremost – people who have individual abilities, interests and needs.

- They are moms, dads, sons, daughters, sisters, brothers, friends, neighbors, coworkers, students and teachers.
- Our nation's largest minority group (one in five people in America have a disability)
- A minority group that anyone can join at any time.

Communication through our senses

Humans use their five senses of sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell to communicate. It may seem like a simple process to see you're a friend or listen to someone talking, but there are many processes taking place inside the body to receive messages through the senses.

- Sight; we communicate messages through sight by using visual signals that include facial expressions, gestures and posture (or body language). We also use visual aids, demonstrations and drama.

Communication through our senses

- Hearing; the most common way for humans to communicate is by the sound made through speech. One person speaks and the other person receives the message by hearing it with their ears.
- Taste; we can communicate by receiving messages through taste. Babies make good use of communicating with their world by tasting things around them. Food can communicate hospitality.

Communication through our senses

Touch; we communicate with touch by feeling things. People hug to show that they are happy to see each other, shake hands to show that they agree, or put their arms around a person who is upset. Use caution with hugging or putting your arms around another person to console them, especially if they are of the opposite sex. Always be sure there are other volunteers in the room that are able to see you. Always ask permission, and use a safe side hug and not a full frontal embrace. Handshakes are also appropriate.

Communication through our senses

Smell; we send and receive messages through smell. We can smell dangerous things like smoke from a fire or poisonous gas. We can also smell pleasant things like flowers or a freshly baked cake. Smell communicates powerful messages to our noses.

Does not use words (nonverbal):

This does not mean that our adult friends cannot hear or understand. They may be able to communicate in other ways such as pointing, using a letter board, showing expression with their eyes, or by touch or simple motions. Ask their family or staff how they communicate. Family and staff are welcome and encouraged to participate in the class with the individual with the disability.

Speech that is difficult to understand:

This may be caused by poor word formation due to disability; i.e. physical problems, hearing problems, or mental word processing. Keep trying to understand, do not give a signal that you understand when you don't. Ask them to repeat or slow down.

Try to communicate in other ways such as pointing, repeating what you hear and asking clarifying questions. Do not be afraid to ask for someone's assistance, especially from their friends. Wait patiently, even with long pauses. Getting to know them over time will help.

Interacting with People with Intellectual Disabilities:

- Be patient
- Be prepared to repeat yourself
- Present tasks & ideas in small, sequential steps
- Provide positive feedback
- Interact normally (“So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them...” (Matthew 7:12))

Interacting with People with Intellectual Disabilities:

- They understand more than you realize
- Don't talk about them while they are present
- Talk to adults as adults; don't talk down to them
- Talk with them even when they are not able to respond
- Start the conversation with a simple question needing a simple answer (i.e. Is that your Bible? Do you work at Shares?)
- Be clear and concise

Interacting with People with Intellectual Disabilities:

- Include the person with a disability in any conversation when they are with their family, friends, or other person
- Begin with simple topics; i.e. weather, sports colts
- Enjoy their spontaneity
- Look for their spiritual gifts and natural talents (everyone has God given abilities and gifts) and recognize them
- End long conversations by being honest and up front

Interacting with People with Visual Disabilities

- Identify yourself
- Talk normally; there is no need to speak louder
- Offer your arm for assistance; let them hold your arm
- Give specific verbal cues when walking
- Describe surroundings and/or others present
- Allow them to touch objects

Interacting with People with Visual Disabilities

- Hold their chair when they sit down or get up
- Avoid escalators and revolving doors
- Tell them when you are leaving
- Don't be afraid to tell them you will see them soon.

Interacting with a person using a wheelchair

- If the conversation is more than a few words, sit down or go down on one knee so you are at their eye level.
- Only push their wheelchair after asking permission
- People use a wheelchair for freedom and mobility; they are not “confined” in a wheelchair
- Do not move their wheelchair or other assistive devices without permission. Always return them before leaving. Never play with a wheelchair. It is offensive to people who use them.

Interacting with People with Physical Disabilities

- Be patient and allow the person time to complete tasks
- Ask if there is a way you can help, before you help
- Shake hands as you would with others even if their hand is different. Pulling away shows rejection.
- Look for ways to modify activities so everyone can participate

Interacting with People with a Hearing Disability

- Face them and make eye contact
- Tap on shoulder to get their attention
- Always look at the person, even when a sign language interpreter is available
- Move away from background noise
- Move closer to them rather than shouting

Interacting with People with a Hearing Disability

- If they read lips, speak normally (or slow down)
- Use sign language. If you do not know sign language, learn simple signs, gesturing, or facial expressions.
- Write or draw what you are trying to communicate
- Ask the person to repeat themselves if you didn't understand

Interacting with People with Autism/ASD

- Use the fewest words possible to communicate information
- Pause between words and phrases to allow time for them to think and respond
- Be consistent and keep a routine
- Speak calmly, slow down and speak in a normal tone
- Exaggerate facial expressions and shake head yes or no
- Use picture symbols, i.e. cue cards, communication book, photos

Interacting with People when they use Inappropriate Language

- Tell them that you like them, just not that kind of talk
- Let them know that their language is inappropriate (most are familiar with the word “inappropriate”)
- That hurts my (or others) feelings
- We should not use that kind of language.

People First Language to use:

- Always try to use a person's name before a pronoun or group label
- People with disabilities
- People with intellectual disabilities
- My son has autism/ASD
- She has Down Syndrome
- He is a person with a seizure disorder

People First Language to use:

- He uses a wheelchair
- She has a developmental disability
- He has an orthopedic disability
- She has short stature
- He does not use words or He has no speech
- She has a learning disability

Talking about people that use assistive equipment

Disability is not the “problem.” For example, a person who wears glasses doesn’t say, “I have a problem seeing,” they say, “I wear glasses.” Similarly, a person who uses a wheelchair doesn’t say, “I have a problem walking,” they say, “I use a wheelchair.” (not I am “confined or restricted” to a wheelchair).

Terms you should not use:

- Mental Retardation (although it is a medical term still used today)
- Disabled
- Handicapped
- Impaired
- Delayed
- Slow
- Nonverbal