



## **Basic Strategies for Interacting with Individuals with Disabilities**

Adapted from the Effective Communications for People with Disabilities Guide  
National Council on Disability

### **Individuals with Speech Disabilities**

- Give the person your full attention.
- Don't complete their sentences.
- Ask them to repeat information for confirmation.
- Ask to write information down.
- Minimize distractions and background noise.
- Create a simple communication board.

### **Individuals with Physical Disabilities**

- Try sitting to be face to face to those in wheelchairs or scooters when you talk to them.
- If you notice they must strain to look up to see you, step back to reduce the angle.
- Don't lean on a person's equipment unless you have permission: it's their personal space.
- Be aware of what is accessible and not accessible to people who use mobility devices.
- Only assist when you have been asked to do so.

### **Individuals who are Blind or have Low Vision**

- Identify yourself when interacting (Say your name and role.)
- Notify when you're stepping away or leaving.
- Offer a tour of the space and allow time to familiarize to the space.
- Ask how you can orient or guide them around the space.
- Provide print materials in alternate format of choice, if requested.
- Let them know about physical changes to facilities.

### **Individuals with Respiratory Disabilities**

- Maintain good ventilation and indoor air quality.
- Follow and enforce no-smoking regulations.
- Avoid the use of fragranced body-care products and cleaning products.



### **Individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing**

- Let the person take the lead in establishing the communication mode. such as lip-reading, sign language, or writing notes.
- Face the person when you are speaking.
- Don't chew gum, smoke, bite a pencil, or cover your mouth while talking. It makes speech difficult to understand.
- If the individual is unable to understand something you have said, re-phrase sentences or substitute words rather than repeat yourself again.
- Speak clearly and at your usual volume level unless they ask you to speak up.
- Move away from noisy areas or turn off loud distractions.

### **Individuals with Intellectual, Cognitive, or Developmental Disabilities**

- Use clear sentences and concrete concepts.
- Treat people as adults and allow them to make decisions.
- Be patient when asking questions and waiting for responses.
- Allow more time to complete tasks.
- Use easy to understand terminology.
- Provide pictures outlining steps.
- Allow time to adjust to change in environment of routine.

### **Individuals with Psychiatric Disabilities**

- Speak calmly to reduce anxiety in overwhelming situations.
- Show support by giving individuals breaks if needed.
- Offer a quiet place to regroup if things are overwhelming.
- If you need to refocus the person, remind them of the topic of discussion.
- Be positive and have the same expectations for them as you do for others regarding tasks.
- If you need to refocus the person, remind them of the topic of discussion.
- Criticism should be done privately and provide positive suggestions for improvement.

### **Individuals with Services Animals**

- **Modify “no pets” policy to allow service animals in the workplace or business.**
- **Do not pet or distract a working animal.**
- **Do not offer food or treats to the animal.**
- **When it is not obvious what service an animal provides, only limited inquiries are allowed. Staff may ask two questions: (1) is the dog a service animal required because of a disability, and (2) what work, or task has the dog been trained to perform. -ADA**