

Handy Tips on Talking to People With Disability



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We often hear individuals can feel **unsure of how to talk to people with disability.** It is really the same as speaking to people without disability.



To support you, **we have included some good tips on how to ensure you are respectful and inclusive.**

Being positive, confident and genuine will get you most of the way to making everyone feel included.

Here are some tips to make communication even more accessible.



General Tips

? What:

Get rid of out-dated terms and deficit language

? Why:

Subtle language changes can make a big difference to the inclusive culture of your organisation.

Avoid terms like ‘special needs’, ‘differently abled’, ‘person of all abilities’ or language that implies a person with disability is inspirational because of their disability.

Avoid deficit language like “you must be blind” when someone can’t find something.

? What:

When in doubt use person-first language

? Why:

‘Person with disability’ identifies the person rather than the disability. For example, use ‘person who is blind instead’ of ‘blind person’.

The disability community is diverse and some people do prefer identity-first language, like ‘I am Autistic’ over

‘I am a person with Autism’. The best thing you can do is listen and take their lead. It’s okay to ask too if you are unsure.



General Tips

? What:

Talk to a person directly

? Why:

If a person with disability has an interpreter or support worker, don't speak only to the support worker. Continue to make eye contact with the person with disability directly, the support worker or interpreter are there for support only. The most important thing is to be natural and speak in a normal tone.

? What:

Have two-way conversations

? Why:

Even if you are nervous about saying the wrong thing or causing offense to a person with disability, it is really important to continue having a two-way conversation to build understanding and ensure everyone feels comfortable.



General Tips

? What:

Be open and flexible

? Why:

Try not to try too hard! Everyone, even people with disability will get it wrong occasionally. If you are open and flexible in your approach then the conversation will progress naturally just like any other conversation.

? What:

Offer help

? Why:

Offer help, some people with disability may not want to ask for help because they are embarrassed that people will judge them or lose faith in them being able to perform their role. Offering help instead of assuming a person with disability needs help, shows that you care and indicates that people can come to you because you have shown that you are willing to support them.



Disability Specific Tips

Autism

Avoid using idioms like “take a chair” as a person with Autism may take the literal meaning and pick up the chair. Instead ask “would you like to sit down?”.

Blind and low vision

If a person who is low vision or blind is having difficulty in finding a seat, always verbally ask the person if they require assistance before physically assisting them.

Greet people who are blind or have low vision as you approach them as they may not see you coming. Ensure they know you are talking to them by using their name and saying yours along with your title or role.

Wheelchair

When talking to someone in a wheelchair or motorised scooter, a motorised wheelchair or scooter, ask them if they would prefer you to bend down to their eye level or not – some people prefer this, some people don't.

Deaf and hard of hearing

When a person is deaf or hard of hearing, face them as they may be able to lip read, remember to talk normally and clearly. Accompany any verbal instructions with clear physical directions. It's always good to have an option of written communication like a smartphone or pen and paper.



Disability Specific Tips

Intellectual disability

The key is to use simple English and take the time to be patient and prepared to ask things in a number of different ways.

Be prepared to:

- potentially repeat and use open questions if necessary.
- Don't ask multiple questions in one.
- Where possible keep information to one key point per sentence and one question at a time.

Non-verbal

Don't assume a person who is non-verbal can't communicate, they may use an alternate communication device such as an iPad or assistive text to talk technology. They may also use other aids, such as paper and pencil, a communication book or board.



Be a part of the **bigger picture**
and learn how to be more inclusive
of people with disability with the
Recruitable resources.

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