

# 10 Steps to Communicating Effectively with People with Disabilities

1. Remember that people with disabilities are people first. When referring to someone with a disability, be sure to refer to the person first. For example, say “person who is blind” instead of “blind person.”
2. Speak directly to the person rather than through their companion or sign language interpreter.
3. When introduced to a person with a disability, it is appropriate to offer to shake hands. People with limited hand use or who wear an artificial limb can usually shake hands. If necessary, shaking hands with the left hand is an acceptable greeting.
4. Treat adults as adults. Never patronize people using wheelchairs by patting them on the head or shoulder.
5. All assistive devices (canes, wheelchairs, crutches, communication boards, etc.) should always be respected as personal property. Do not move, play with or move them without permission.
6. If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted before you act.
7. Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use a common expression such as “See you Later” or “Got to be running along” that seems to relate to a person's disability. People who are visually/mobility impaired use these expressions too.
8. To get the attention of a person with a hearing loss, tap the person on the shoulder or wave your hand. Look directly at the person and speak clearly and slowly.
9. When greeting a person with a severe loss of vision, always identify yourself and others who may be with you.
10. Listen attentively when talking with people who have difficulty speaking and wait for them to finish. Never pretend to understand; instead repeat what you have understood and allow the person to respond.