Disability and Effective Communications

EARN Training Center
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# Effective Communications

## Positive Phrases
- Person with an intellectual, cognitive, developmental disability
- Person who is blind or visually impaired
- Person with a disability
- Person who is deaf or hard of hearing
- Person with multiple sclerosis
- Person with cerebral palsy
- Person who uses a wheelchair

## Negative Phrases
- The retarded; mentally retarded
- The blind
- The disabled; handicapped
- The deaf; deaf and dumb
- Someone afflicted by MS
- A CP victim
- Wheelchair bound/confined

Tips for Interacting with People with Disabilities

• When speaking with a person with a disability, talk directly to the person, not to his or her companion
• Extend common courtesies to people with disabilities
• If the person has a speech impairment and you are having difficulty understanding what he or she is saying, ask the individual to repeat, rather than pretending to understand
• If you believe that an individual with a disability needs assistance, go ahead and offer the assistance — but wait for your offer to be accepted before you try to help
• If a person uses a sign language interpreter, speak directly to the person, not to the interpreter
DISABILITY DOs & DON’Ts
Deaf or Hard of Hearing

- Speak directly to the Deaf person, not his or her sign language interpreter
- Please don’t cover your face, exaggerate speech or chew gum
- Face the person
- Write notes to help facilitate communication
- Body language, gestures and pointing can help with communication
- Deaf culture is rich in its beauty and storytelling
- American Sign Language (ASL) is not universal

Preferred Semantics
- Say “Deaf or Hard of Hearing,” not Hearing Impaired
- Deaf activists use a capital “D” to claim their Deaf identity, power and pride
Blind or Low Vision

- Announce yourself when you enter and leave a conversation
- Offer your arm and ask the person if they need assistance
- When giving directions, be specific - five steps to the right, down seven stairs, instead of “over there”
- Not all people who are Blind use Braille; many people with low vision read large print (at least 14 point font), not Braille
- If a person who is Blind uses a service animal, don’t distract or pet it; the service animal is working

Preferred Semantics
- Blind and low vision is preferred
- It’s OK to say: “See you later” or “Good to see you again”
Mobility

• Never lean on someone’s wheelchair; it is part of their personal space
• Don’t push someone using a wheelchair unless he or she asks
• When talking with a wheelchair user, position yourself at eye level
• If a wheelchair user is with a non-disabled companion, don’t talk with the companion instead of the individual
• If a wheelchair user uses a service animal, don’t distract or pet it

Preferred Semantics

• Wheelchair user or wheelchair rider
• Person who uses a wheelchair
• Don’t say “wheelchair bound” or “confined to a wheelchair”
Speech

• Talk in a normal tone of voice
• If you don’t understand what was said, ask the person to repeat what you heard and ask if that was correct
• Don’t finish sentences or hurry the person
• If “language” issues (in addition to problems with fluency and articulation) are present, expect:
  • “talk-around” behavior
  • word-finding difficulties
  • very short or very long answers to questions

Preferred Semantics:
• People with speech disabilities or people who stutter
Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

- Developmental Disability is a broad term that encompasses Intellectual Disability, the difference between the two is focused on intellectual functioning and limitations in adaptive behaviors
  - Developmental disabilities (occurs before age 22): Cerebral palsy, Epilepsy, Down syndrome
  - Intellectual disabilities (occurs before age 18)
    - Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
    - Autism (1 in 68 children in the United States)
    - Autism Spectrum Disorder – Asperger’s Syndrome, Rett Syndrome

Preferred Semantics
- Please do not use medical model words such as: victim of, afflicted with, or suffers from
- People first language, people with IDD, not mentally retarded
  (Spread the Word to End the Word www.r-word.org)
- Many people living with autism prefer to be called autistic
- Neurotypical (not having autism or an IDD); Neurodivergent (having autism, on the ASD)
Non-Apparent / Hidden

• Don’t assume someone is not a person with a disability because you don’t see his or her disability
  • Learning Disabilities: Auditory Processing Disorder, Dyslexia, ADHD
  • Emotional or Psychiatric Disabilities: Bi-Polar Disorder, Anxiety, Depression
  • Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
  • And many more, including: Diabetes, HIV, Cancer

• According to Career Opportunities for Students with Disabilities, 70% of college students with disabilities have non-apparent disabilities.

• These people are not dangerous

Preferred Semantics
• People first language
• People with disabilities aren’t “crazy”