

Level Playing Field

www.levelplayingfield.org.uk



Guidance on interacting with a disabled person

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General Guidance

When you introduce yourself, offer to shake hands with the disabled person. Offer assistance, but wait until it is accepted and provide the help in the way the person requests you to — don't be offended by a refusal for assistance.

See the person not the impairment.

Don't make assumptions: remember that anybody may have a hidden impairment e.g. diabetes or epilepsy. It is acceptable to ask questions if you're not sure what to do. But respect the answers given by the disabled person if they do not wish to discuss their impairment.

Blind/ Partially Sighted People

Tell a blind/ partially sighted person who you are; introduce other people who are there and say where they are.

Ask the person if they need your assistance when walking to a location.

Don't grab a person to guide them — let them take your arm; do ask them if they wish to be warned about steps, doors and other obstacles.

Say clearly where their seat is, or place their hand on its back or arm.

Always tell the person when you are stepping away or leaving.

If they have an assistance dog, get permission to touch and interact with it.

When giving directions, make sure the person knows every detail.

Some people are disabled in more than one way, e.g. deafblind. Make yourself known by touching their sleeve gently and then wait until they have indicated the type of help they require if any.

Wheelchair users and ambulant disabled people:

Try to get at a wheelchair user's eye level, or stand back a little.

Do not lean on a person's wheelchair or other mobility device.

Interacting with a disabled person

Ask the person if they want assistance in moving around or in opening doors, but bear in mind that they might want to perform these tasks for themselves.

Do not pat the person on the head or shoulder, as that is considered patronising

Deaf or hard of hearing people

Ask them to tell you their preferred method of communication, for many Deaf people sign language is their first language.

Many Deaf people do not consider themselves as disabled.

Don't shout at Deaf or hard of hearing people. Position yourself in their vision, and attract their attention with a light touch or a wave if you need to, before conversing.

Look directly at the person (even if they are using a sign language interpreter) and speak in a regular tone, with your hands away from your face.

Try not to avoid lengthy, complex sentences- where necessary check they are following what is being said and rephrase if necessary.

Do not assume that all deaf people can lip read. Ask the person. If they do lip read note that the skill is never wholly reliable and requires intense concentration.

When talking, face the person. A quiet, well-lit room is most conducive to effective communication. If you are in front of the light source (e.g., a window) with your back to it, the glare may obscure your face and make it difficult for the person who is hearing impaired to lip read.

People with a speech impairment

Be patient with people with speech impairments; don't correct them; don't interrupt them, don't finish their sentences; if you don't understand, don't pretend you do, so do ask them to repeat if necessary, and tell them what you have understood so far. If necessary find another way of communicating or move to a quieter environment.

People with a Learning Disability

Treat people as individual, responsible adults, and don't assume that they can't do anything.

Begin by assuming you will be understood.

Be patient, and be ready to explain something more than once and in easy steps.

Check with the person that you understand what they are saying – "the TV isn't working? Is that right?"

Watch the person – they may tell you things by their body language and facial expressions.

Learn from experience – you will need to be more observant and don't feel awkward about asking parents and/ or PA/carer's for their help.

People who have Autism

People who have autism often won't make eye contact, have difficulty understanding tone of voice and body language as a way of expressing sarcasm, humour, irony, etc. Speak in a high pitched voice. Their language tends to reflect the 'correct language' rather than socially correct language.

When talking, face the person, even if they do not give eye contact. A quiet, well-lit room is most conducive to effective communication.