

TEN TIPS FOR COMMUNICATING WITH PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES*

1. Speak directly rather than through a companion or the sign language interpreter who may be present.
2. Offer to shake hands when introduced. People with limited hand use or artificial limb can usually shake hands and offering the left hand is an acceptable greeting.
3. Always identify yourself and others who may be with you when meeting someone with a visual disability. When conversing in a group, remember to identify the person to whom you are speaking.

When dining with a friend with a visual disability, ask if you can describe what is on his or her plate using the clock to describe the location of the food, i.e., potato is at 3 o'clock.

4. If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted. Then listen or ask for instructions.
5. Treat adults as adults. Address people with disabilities by their first names only when extending that same familiarity to all others. Never patronize people of short stature or people in wheelchairs by patting them on the head or shoulder.
6. Do not lean against or hang on someone's wheelchair or scooter. Bear in mind that people with disabilities treat their wheelchairs or scooters as extensions of their bodies.

The same goes for people with service animals. Never distract a work animal from their job without the owner's permission.

7. Listen attentively when talking with people who have difficulty speaking and wait for them to finish. If necessary, ask short questions that require short answers, or a nod of the head. Never pretend to understand; instead repeat what you have understood and allow the person to respond.
8. Place yourself at eye level when speaking with someone who is of short stature or who is in a wheelchair or on crutches.
9. Tap a person who has a hearing disability on the shoulder or wave your hand to get at his or her attention. Look directly at the person and speak clearly, slowly, and expressively to establish if the person can read your lips. If so, try to face the light source and keep hands, cigarettes and food away from your mouth when speaking.

If a person is wearing a hearing aid, don't assume that they have the ability to discriminate your speaking voice. Do not raise your voice. Speak slowly and clearly in a normal tone of voice.

10. Relax. Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use common expressions such as "See you later" or "Did you hear about this?" that seem to relate to a person's disability.

The United Cerebral Palsy Association, Inc. (UCPA) adopted the ten tips from many sources as a public service. The UCPA's version of the ten tips has been updated by Linda P. McCulloh of the Education Division/CJER of the Administrative Office of the Courts.