



ACCESS INTERACT

“Accessible peer interaction with disabled youth.”

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Intellectual output 2:

Handbook

**"ABC to inclusive communication with
my peers with disabilities.”**

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1. Introduction

This "ABC to inclusive communication with my peers with disabilities" handbook has been developed for youth organisations and their members to increase their level of disability awareness and to enable natural and appropriate communication with their members with disabilities.



According to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)¹, disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments, and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and active participation in society on an equal basis with others.

Under the social model, someone's impairment (for example mobility) is an individual characteristic, while "disability" is something created by external societal factors such as a lack of physical access to the workplace or whatever social service and goods that the person might use.

Abilities can vary from person to person and can even change over time. People can have a combination of different impairments, each in varying levels of severity.

¹ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>

Disability awareness means educating people regarding disabilities and giving people the knowledge to ensure an inclusive communication experience for all those active in youth organisations, or for those who would like to join youth activities.

We also address youth with hidden disabilities who often do not feel like they belong within the disability community because they are not considered to be “disabled enough” to fit into the group. As a result, youths with hidden disabilities find themselves caught between not being fully accepted as people without disabilities, and not being recognised as having “real” disabilities.

Finally, this handbook aims to:

- Develop a greater understanding of the definition of disability (**A – About**) among young people active (or not) in youth organisations;
- Understand how this impacts a person’s day-to-day life (**B - Barriers**), and especially their participation in youth activities, and to identify the potential barriers;
- Promote to youth workers/leaders a greater awareness of the effects of inclusive communication (**C – Communication**) among the youth community and in the society as a whole;

This "ABC to inclusive communication with my peers with disabilities" will thus help young people recognise and overcome any assumptions they may have about people with disabilities. This ABC can be equally used by teachers/trainers in mainstream schools, VET and adult education who are interested in establishing inclusive communication awareness campaigns.

2. General tips for communicating with people with a disability

2.1. Ask before...

The “Ask before...” principle is one of the most important tips, applicable to any situation where you are interacting with a person with an impairment. This requires us always to ask the person before:

- Offering him/her assistance or support;
- Making any assumptions about his/her medical condition;
- Supposing what his/her abilities are and what barriers s/he faces;
- Giving advice.



As you probably figured out already, this is about the boundaries we should respect when we communicate among each other, no matter whether we are persons with impairments ourselves, or whether we are interacting with people with impairments, or whether we are people without impairments.

To illustrate what we mean, here is an example of a communication situation between a lady with a visual impairment and a gentleman without an impairment who meet each other at a crossroad with traffic lights. The gentleman without a disability decides to help by grasping the other woman’s hand and leading her across the street. When they get to the other side, the lady with a disability says “What are you doing? I was not planning to cross the street – I am just waiting for someone?!”

2.2. How to greet a person with a disability

How do you greet someone without a disability in your community?

Sometimes people **feel uncomfortable** talking with people with disabilities, because they feel sorry for them, assume that they are bitter about their disability, or are afraid of saying something “wrong”. However, none of these is considered crucial by many people with disabilities. What is important is that you respect the person and see them beyond their disability.

How would you greet someone with a paralysed or missing right arm?

Most people, even those with a prosthetic limb, can shake hands. It is appropriate to use your left hand if the person cannot respond with his/her right hand.

The disabled person will usually give you a cue by extending an arm or hand as best they can.

How would you greet a person who uses a wheelchair?

When speaking to someone in a wheelchair or lying in bed, look around, pull up a chair if possible, sit down or kneel to get at eye level.

If your conversation continues longer than 5 minutes, you should sit down to facilitate eye contact. This is crucial!

How would you greet a person with an intellectual disability?

Have you ever noticed that when you speak to someone who doesn't understand the language you are using, that you tend to raise your voice, thinking that somehow shouting the words will rattle their brain into understanding? We sometimes do the same thing when we address people with intellectual disabilities. Usually, there is no need to raise your voice. However, when someone has a cognitive impairment, for example, it can help

to slow down and speak clearly. Use their first name only if everyone else is being referred to by their first name. Better yet, ask for their preference.

How to greet a person with a visual impairment?

First, introduce yourself by stating your name when you meet or greet a person with visual impairment. (eg. “Hi, Simon, this is Mrs Thompson. How are you today?”) Avoid asking “Did you recognise me?” or “Guess who is this?”, etc. as this can be embarrassing for the person.

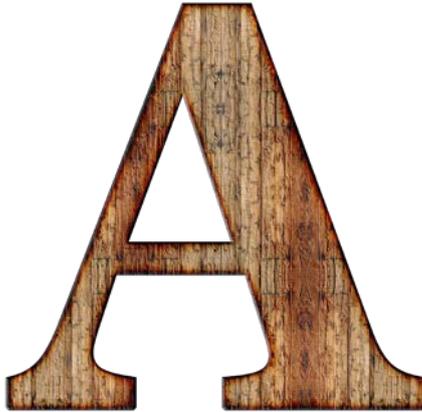
Calling the person’s name is like making eye contact with people with visual impairments. Touch his arm or shoulder lightly as you do so, to be sure that your communication partner knows you are addressing him.

If while you have a conversation with a person with a visual impairment, and you greet someone who is passing, be sure you greet him by name, so your communication partner knows who it is.

Try not to disappear during your interactions. Tell the person when you are leaving and inform him/her if you are planning to discontinue your conversation by using words that mark the end of the discussion. For example: “This is all that I want to say”.

In the following sections, we will look at a range of disabilities, the barriers faced and the accommodations, alternatives and tips.

3. Communicating with people with physical disabilities



3.1. About

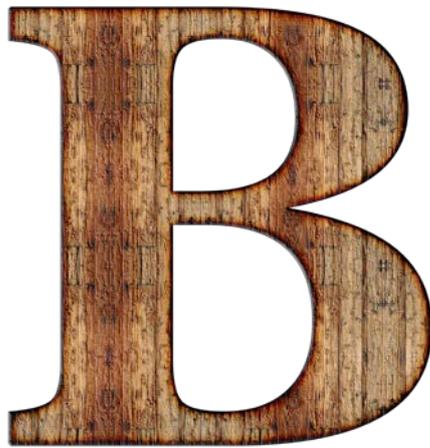
A physical disability is related to a person's physical functioning, such as mobility, dexterity or stamina. Not all people with physical impairments are the same.

Some physical disabilities may impact various aspects of daily life, such as health, living with pain or poor sleep patterns.

Not all people with a disability have a precise medical diagnosis, but there are many causes of a physical disability amongst young people. These might include:

- Traumatic brain injury
- Cerebral palsy
- Cystic fibrosis
- Spinal cord injury
- Multiple sclerosis
- Spina bifida
- Prader-Willi syndrome

People with a physical disability may experience a loss of freedom and independence, with a mixture of frustration and anger at having to rely on other people. This in turn could lead to poor mental health, such as anxiety or depression related to low self-esteem or a lack of confidence. This may be a particular concern in social situations.



3.2. Barriers

People with a physical disability may experience many barriers that reduce their opportunities to engage fully and independently in society.

Barriers may include inaccessible public transport and buildings, leading to a reduced range of available activities and subsequently reduced participation in daily

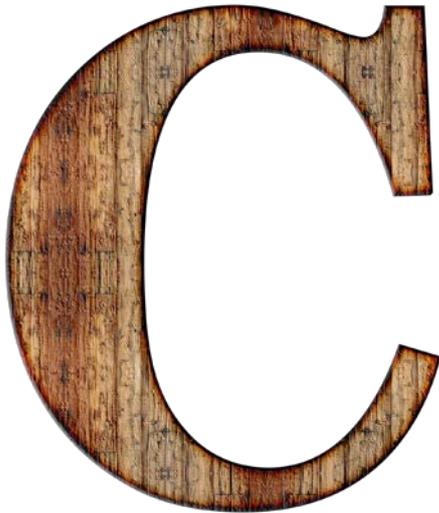
life and societal activities.

Many people with a physical disability suggest that the most significant single barrier to their full inclusion in society is the attitudes of others, and not their condition or needs.

For example: Young people with a physical disability may have problems in communicating. Therefore, it is vital that we do not make assumptions about abilities just because the speech is very slow or slurred.

A physical disability can also impact on written communication. When reading, pages can be hard to turn, and notices or leaflets may be positioned at a height which makes reading hard. When writing, holding a pen or typing may be impossible.

People with physical disabilities experience a wide range of barriers, which vary depending on how the environment is designed and made accessible.



3.3. Communication

When communicating with people with a physical disability, the following tips are useful

- Speak directly rather than through a companion or personal assistant.
- Offer to shake hands when introduced. Those with limited use of their hands or with an artificial limb can usually shake hands.
- Identify yourself and others who

may be with you when approaching someone with a physical disability. They may not have the ability of full rotation of their body to turn towards the sound of someone approaching them.

- Offer assistance and wait until the offer is accepted. Then listen or ask for instructions.
- Treat adults as adults. Use first names only when extending that same familiarity to all others.
- Listen attentively when talking with people who have difficulty speaking and wait for them to finish. If necessary, ask short questions that require brief answers, or a nod of the head.
- Place yourself at eye level when speaking with someone who is of short stature or who is in a wheelchair or on crutches.

Equally, it is useful to avoid the following

- Never pretend to understand; instead, repeat what you have understood and allow the person to respond or clarify.
- 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.
- Never patronise people by patting them on the head or shoulder.

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

The language we use can also create barriers and reinforce poor attitudes. To address this, we should try to

- Avoid phrases such as "Handicapped man confined to a wheelchair...", "A girl stricken with cerebral palsy...", etc.
- Avoid the use of negative words which create incorrect perceptions of people with disabilities.

Negative attitudes are often the most difficult barriers for people with disabilities to overcome, so:

- When describing a person with a disability, refer to the person first.
- Rather than saying or writing "disabled man" or "afflicted with a disability", refer to "a person with a disability" or "a person who is disabled."
- Do not label a group of individuals as "the disabled"; which puts the focus on their disabilities.
- Terms such as "People with disabilities" or "individuals who use wheelchairs" place people first.
- Avoid terms such as "Afflicted" as it is a negative term suggesting hopelessness.
- Avoid terms such as "Confined to a wheelchair." People are not imprisoned in wheelchairs. Individuals use wheelchairs to move.
- "Crippled" implies someone who is pitiful and unable to do anything.
- "Poor" describes a lack of money or someone to be pitied.
- "Retard" and "retarded" are unacceptable terms. Some disabilities may make people appear awkward; this does not mean the individual has an intellectual disability.
- "Spastic." People should not be labelled because they lack coordination as a result of physical or neurological impairments.

- "Suffering." To say that someone suffers from a disability implies that the disability causes constant pain; this is not always true.
- "Unfortunate" implies unlucky or unsuccessful.
- "Victim" is a person affected by an uncontrollable force or person. Individuals with disabilities are not helpless victims.

Remember: Thinking about the language we use, alongside how we interact and communicate with people with a physical disability will make a significant contribution towards a more inclusive setting.

4. Communicating with people with a vision impairment

4.1. About

Vision Impairment, also known as Visual Impairment or Vision Loss, is characterised by a total or partial impairment of the visual ability of one or both eyes, which can't be corrected or improved with the use of clinical or surgical treatment lenses.



This type of impairment can be congenital (from birth onwards), such as ocular malformation, or hereditary eye diseases like glaucoma. It can also be acquired, such as ocular trauma, senile degeneration of corneas and even changes related to arterial hypertension or diabetes.

Vision impairment can be recognised by:

- non-visual recognition of objects and people
- poor achievements at school
- developmental delay

Vision impairment can be divided into two main groups:

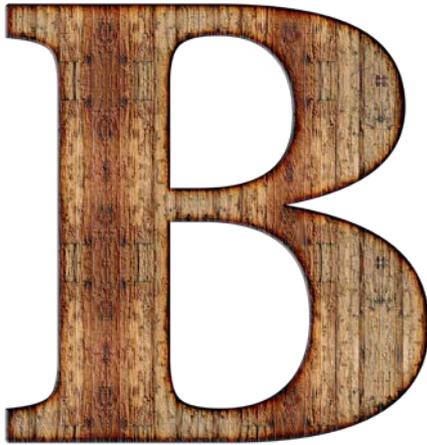
- subnormal vision or low vision, when the loss is mild, moderate, severe or profound and causes a reduction of visual responses, even after treatment or optical correction
- blindness, when there is a total absence of visual response

The diagnosis of vision impairment can be made very early, like in the cases of degeneration such as cataract and glaucoma, which evolve over the years.

Types of visual impairment (different degrees) according to the World Health Organization (WHO) criteria, can be classified into:

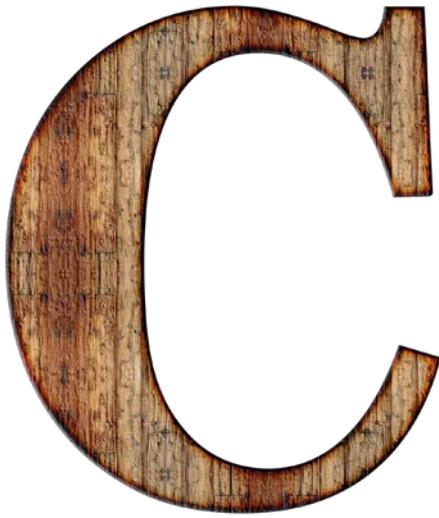
- **Low vision:** This includes mild, moderate or severe vision loss. It can be compensated with the use of magnifying glasses and with the aid of walking sticks and orientation training.
- **Close to blindness:** When the person is still able to distinguish light and shadow in the visual field. These people move with the aid of a walking stick and need orientation and mobility training.
- **Blindness:** When the person can't perceive the presence of light or shadow, the use of a mobility cane and orientation and mobility training are fundamental. **Important:** not every person with vision impairment uses a cane, screenreader software or Braille. It all depends on how the person has developed his/her independence. Maybe s/he prefers to be accompanied by a personal assistant.

4.2. Barriers



People with a vision impairment experience many barriers that reduce their opportunities to engage fully in society, such as:

- **Environmental challenges:** Physical movement is one of the most significant challenges for blind people, they need to memorise the paths they go through with the help of someone else, making it harder to be out in the community;
- **Social challenges:** people with a vision impairment can't easily participate in activities, which affects self-esteem. It is, therefore, necessary to help them to succeed and feel part of the community like everyone else.
- **Technological challenges:** people with vision impairment do face issues in using technologies, although assistive technologies offer increasingly advanced support for using the computer, smartphone, etc.



4.3. Communication

Communicating with people with a vision impairment can be improved by following these tips:

- Introduce yourself. Not everyone recognises voices or remembers them.
- Don't shout. Being visually impaired or blind does not mean being hearing impaired.
- Don't leave a person who is blind talking to themselves. Let them know when you are moving.
- Don't use hand signals. People with severe visual impairments can't see waving or pointing hands.
- Don't omit words like, "See" or "Look". People with visual impairments are not offended by these words and understand that these words are part of regular conversations.
- Do feel free to photograph someone who is blind or visually impaired. Everyone likes to capture special moments to save and show to others. Just remember to ask first, or make them aware you are taking a photo.
- Do speak directly to a person who is vision impaired. Don't talk to a family member, friend or personal assistant while ignoring the person who is vision impaired. Remember, they can speak for themselves.
- Don't push, pull or grab a person who is blind; this can cause accidents and is often embarrassing.
- Do offer your arm for assistance. A person who is blind may prefer holding your arm rather than have you take theirs. Some people prefer touching the shoulder while walking.
- Relax and be yourself; there is no need to feel weird when you talk with someone who has a vision impairment.
- When the person has a service dog, avoid talking to the dog or interacting with it. Never pet, feed, or direct a service dog wearing a

harness or vest. They are there to help the visually impaired person and not for entertainment.

Remember: People with a vision impairment want meaningful friendships just like everyone else, so when you are around someone with such impairment, treat them like you would treat anyone else. Don't forget about them when you are in a group. Always include them in the conversations and describe the environment around them if needed. The only thing that makes them different from you is their vision, so there is nothing to be afraid of!

5. Communicating with people with a hearing impairment



5.1. About

Communication is a vital part of our existence. When one has a hearing loss, the quality of communication can be impaired.

People who are deaf or hard of hearing use a variety of ways to communicate. Some rely on sign language interpreters or assistive listening devices, while some rely

primarily on written messages.

Many can speak even though they cannot hear. The method of communication and the services or aids provided will vary depending upon the abilities of the person who is deaf or hard of hearing and on the complexity and nature of the communications that are required.

People who have a hearing loss but who rely on English or another spoken language as their primary means of communication, are referred to as 'hard of hearing' or 'hearing impaired'. They will usually rely on their remaining hearing, hearing aids and other devices, as well as speech reading (lip reading), visual cues, tactics and strategies to communicate effectively.

People born with a profound hearing loss may receive very little or no benefit from hearing aids. They may find it very difficult to learn to speak because they are not able to hear speech and may choose to communicate in sign language.

Some people with less severe hearing loss can use sign language and often learn to speak. They may choose to communicate in sign language and also use some speech, lip reading and residual hearing to assist communication when appropriate.

When talking to people who are deaf or hard of hearing, it is essential to choose the correct mode of communication whenever possible; this may necessitate the use of a sign language interpreter.

Many factors can disrupt the chain of events which allow hearing to occur.

- **Conductive hearing loss** occurs when the tiny bones of the middle ear fail to conduct sound to the cochlea, or when the eardrum fails to vibrate. The hearing loss that results is usually mild to moderate.
- **Nerve loss** happens when the hair cells of the cochlea or the auditory nerve are damaged. This loss is usually moderate to severe. It can occur because of pre-birth or birth-related problems, and the impact of increasing age (90% of nerve deafness is in people aged over 60).
- **Central hearing loss** is caused by damage to the auditory areas of the brain, perhaps through an acquired brain injury. Some people have psychological hearing loss when there is no physical reason for the loss, but factors such as extreme stress cause them to stop hearing temporarily or permanently.

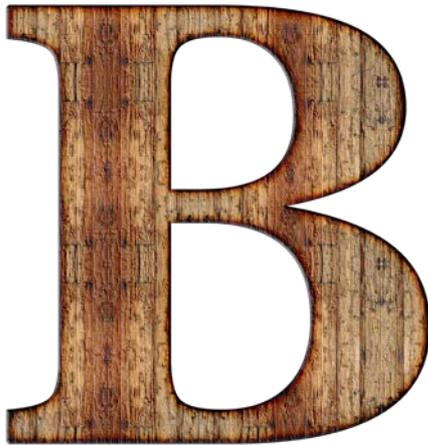
Hearing is a major part of communication. It is important to consider it along with many other factors such as:

- other communication skills (memory, familiarity with English, interpersonal skills, etc.)
- cultural influences on communication
- whether the ideas and information being communicated are new or familiar
- personality, mood, health, etc.

Effective communication involves balancing them all.

The main effect of hearing loss is in understanding and producing speech. When a young person loses their hearing before they learn to speak, their ability to learn speech is substantially reduced because they have not had the opportunity to hear others speak, imitate them and get feedback. Even for those who learned to speak before they lost their hearing, it can be challenging to understand spoken conversations. They may be unable to hear particular sounds like 's', 'f' and 't' or may not be able to filter out unwanted

sounds making it difficult to understand speech in noisy places. Most young people who learn to lip read well can only pick up a certain percentage of speech sounds accurately through the shape of the mouth, and the context of the discussion.

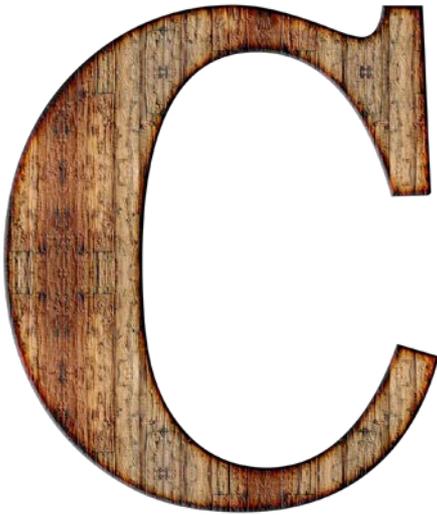


5.2. Barriers

Many young people who acquire a hearing impairment when they are young, learn to sign before they are taught to use spoken language or to write. This means that they learn to speak and write (whether in English or another language) as a second language. This can cause communication difficulties with hearing people. This is partly because sign languages have a very different structure to spoken or written words.

Besides difficulties with communication, some other effects of hearing loss can include:

- Problems in locating the direction that sounds are coming from
- Sound distortion, making it difficult to appreciate music
- Sensitivity to loud noises
- Ringing in the ears (tinnitus)
- Dizziness or loss of balance
- A sense of isolation – feeling cut off and left behind



5.3. Communication

When communicating with people that are hearing impaired, the following points can make the communication process easier:

- Get the young person's attention before speaking. There are many ways of attracting attention. If possible, ask the young person with the hearing loss for suggestions. A gentle touch on the arm may be adequate.
- Let the young person with the hearing loss know the subject of the conversation beforehand, if possible, and try and cue him or her into any change of topic.
- Speak clearly and at a moderate pace. Exaggeration or over emphasis of words can distort mouth movements, making lip reading more difficult. Raising your voice volume excessively, and shouting is not helpful and is often counter-productive.
- Look directly at the young person while speaking and be at the same eye level if possible; stand if they are standing or sit if they are seated. Even a slight turn of the head can obscure vision. Other distractions include beards and moustaches, which hide the lips.
- Try to show facial and body expression. You don't have to be a mime, as everybody uses some form of body language in communication.
- Avoid habits such as smoking, gum or pencil chewing, putting hands in front of the face or eating while speaking.
- Ensure that any lighting is on your face and not behind you. A light behind the speaker will create glare and make it harder for the person to gain visual cues for lip reading. Avoid shadows across your face.
- Cut down background noises where possible. If someone is using speech reading and residual hearing to communicate, background noises can make listening very difficult.
- Maximise environmental visual cues. Good signage, directions, handouts, and notes can all help to convey the message.
- Consider the distance between the young person with the hearing loss and yourself. This will affect listening and lip reading.

- Only about 30% of what we say can be seen on the lips and mouth. Not everyone with a hearing loss can read lips and even the best speech readers' miss many words. If the young person seems to be having difficulty comprehending, try to rephrase the message instead of repeating it exactly.
- Use pencil and paper to supplement your communication if necessary. In a noisy environment, writing down keywords may assist those who are hard of hearing. It is important to be flexible to address each person's needs.
- When in doubt, ask the young person with a hearing loss for suggestions to improve your communication.
- Do not assume that those with a hearing loss do not need a telephone in a work situation, although it may need to be a telephone with a volume or tone control or a visual text telephone app.
- Many young people with a hearing impairment have a small amount of residual hearing, which is enhanced by hearing aids and assistive listening devices. Individuals who are hard of hearing may also benefit from a range of assistive listening devices.
- Communication is enhanced when all parties present are patient, confident and relaxed.

Remember: Communication is a two-way street, and both the listener with the hearing loss and his/her communication partner, can play a role in reducing the problems that may arise during a conversation.

Below are some communication tips that may significantly reduce conversational difficulties.

- If someone you are conversing with wears hearing aids or tells you that she has a hearing loss, do not shout or exaggerate your mouth movements. Just speak clearly, a little bit slower and a little bit louder. Pausing between phrases will help the listener have time to process what you are saying.
- If you see that the person you are conversing with is having difficulty communicating and they do not use hearing aids or other assistive technology, encourage them to get help using modern digital technology or other assistive technology.
- Realise that it can be a strain for people with hearing difficulties to listen for long periods. Try to appreciate that those who have to pay

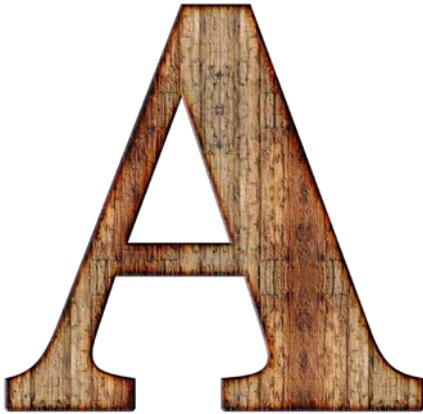
extra attention during conversations will often tire more easily than other listeners and may want to go home earlier than you do from parties, family dinners, and other group events.

- When the listener has missed something you said, try repeating what you said one time, using clear (but not exaggerated) speech. If the person still does not understand, try rewording.
- The best way to speak clearly for people with a hearing loss is to face them, talk a little bit more slowly, a little bit more loudly, and with natural (not monotone) voice intonation. Try not to cover your mouth when you are talking, because that prevents your partner from taking advantage of lip cues.
- When giving directions, such as where and when to meet for a meeting, ask your partner who has a hearing loss if she is clear on the routes by saying something like, "Did that make sense?".
- When the listener with a hearing loss asks you to say something a little bit louder, take it as a compliment. It means she wants to understand what you are saying.
- If the person you are talking with indicates that they have a hearing loss and indicates they want you to speak a bit louder or a bit slower, try to accommodate their needs, it has to be "just right"; i.e., not too slow, not too fast; not too loud, not too soft. The accommodations you make will enable the conversation to flow easily for both of you.
- The listener may benefit tremendously by being able to watch your lips as you speak. Be sure to not cover your mouth with your hands, a restaurant menu, etc., so that the visible features of speech are available.
- Keep reminding yourself that although it may be difficult for you to converse with someone who has a hearing loss, it is even a more significant challenge for that person, given the many difficulties encountered during a typical conversation.

6. Communicating with people with a speech impairment

6.1. About

Speech impairment is a condition in which a person finds it difficult to produce the sounds that are needed to interact with others.

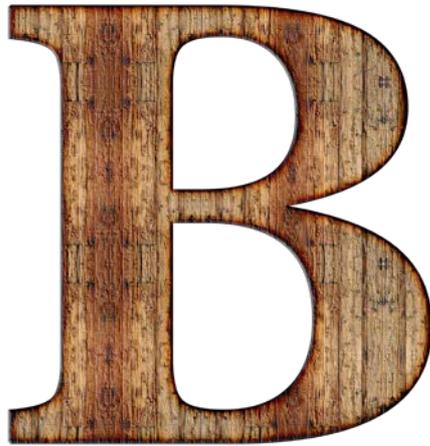


They can be mild, such as occasionally mispronouncing a few words. However, they can also be severe, such as not being

able to produce speech sounds at all.

Speech impairments are not to be confused with language impairment, which is a condition where a person has difficulties in understanding and sharing thoughts and ideas, and where a person cannot process information or communication.

They can involve limited vocabulary, or an inability to form or understand sentences. Language impairments impact our ability to communicate effectively.



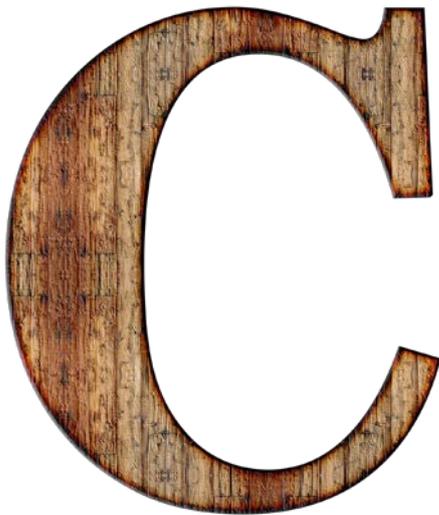
6.2. Barriers

How much a speech impairment affects the quality of life depends on the severity of the impairment as well as how successfully a person manages it.

Young people with severe speech impairments struggle to form communication skills and may feel shame, embarrassment, frustration, anger, and depression. The condition can also cause isolation.

Speech impairments can be subtle and have little or no impact on daily living or can be severe and result in an inability to produce speech or to understand and use language. Only a very small number of young people experience the more severe barriers.

Because language and communication skills are so vital to our lives, even mild to moderate conditions can have a profound effect on all aspects of life, isolating people from their peers and their community.



6.3. Communication

The following tips will support you in communication with a person with a speech impairment:

- Patience is crucial in communicating with anyone who has a speech impairment.
 - Always let a person finish their sentence. It is both rude and discouraging to cut someone off.
 - Be honest, but polite, if you don't understand what was said.
-
- If someone has difficulty communicating, ask questions that require a gesture, such as a nod, or a short answer that is easier to articulate. Sometimes, pen and paper can be helpful.
 - Remember, above all, that the young person may already feel frustrated and embarrassed as they try to communicate.
 - Some people with speech impairments may use AAC (augmentative and alternative communication) systems. These AAC systems may include symbols, signing, gestures, text, etc.
 - Technology that helps give people a voice can be helpful where the technology can speak out anything that a person writes.

7. Communicating with people with an intellectual disability

7.1. About

Intellectual disability is a reduced ability to understand, learn, and apply new or complex information and tasks.



People with intellectual disabilities have a below average mental functioning, which causes a delay in the learning and development of these individuals.

Intellectual disability usually manifests itself before the age of 18 and is characterised mainly by changes in the development of cognitive functions (reasoning, memory, attention, and judgment), language, motor skills and socialisation.

The causes of intellectual disability may be genetic or not. Among the genetic, the most common is Down Syndrome. Non-genetic causes may include complications during pregnancy (rubella, drug use, alcohol abuse, maternal malnutrition), birth problems (prematurity, lack of oxygen, trauma), and diseases and conditions that affect health, such as measles, meningitis, diet, exposure to lead and mercury, among others.

The main characteristics of intellectual disability are:

- lack of concentration
- difficulty in interacting and communicating
- reduced ability to understand language (they do not understand writing or need a particular learning system)

These may impact upon

Physical skills such as :

- the finer movements

- difficulties in maintaining balance
- difficulty in motor coordination, locomotion and manipulation of objects

Cognitive skills such as:

- concentration
- memory
- problem-solving

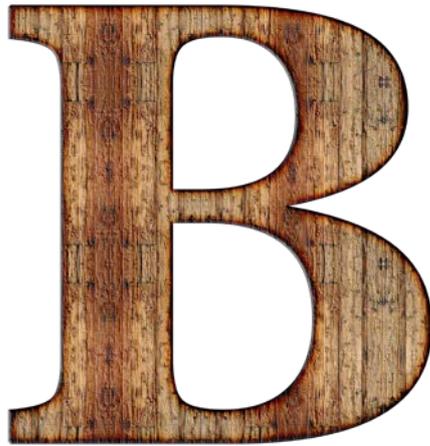
Communication skills, which can make it difficult for the person to be understood or interact.

Socio-educational skills. There may be a decrease in social interactions in the school environment since the mental age is delayed in comparison to the neurotypical development age.

Indicative signs of intellectual disability:

- lack of interest in classroom activities
- little interaction with colleagues and teacher
- difficulty in motor coordination (gross and fine)
- difficulty identifying letters, developing speech satisfactorily (communication is one of the faculties affected)
- difficulty in adapting to the most varied environments
- when the child loses or forgets what he/she had already learned (and ability to demonstrate)

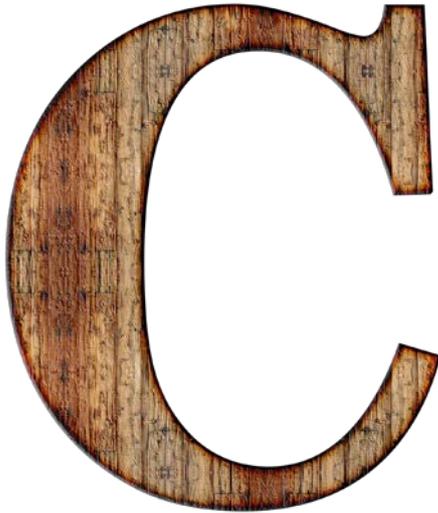
The treatment of an intellectual disability aims to reinforce and facilitate the development of the individual's skills, providing the support he/she needs to overcome his/her difficulties.



7.2. Barriers

People with an intellectual disability experience many barriers that reduce their opportunities to engage fully in society, such as:

- a physical environment that is not accessible, they have physical issues to move around
- a lack of relevant assistive technology (assistive, adaptive, and rehabilitative devices) that will help them to be more active and independent in society
- negative attitudes towards people with an intellectual disability, treating them like they don't matter or they don't need to know what is happening
- people sometimes stereotype the disabilities, assuming their quality of life is poor or that they are unhealthy because of their impairments
- within society, prejudices may come from people's ideas related to disability; they may see intellectual disability as a personal tragedy, as something that needs to be cured or prevented, as a punishment for wrongdoing, or as an indication of the lack of ability to behave as expected in society
- people with an intellectual disability are at a higher risk of suffering sexual abuse from family members or caregivers
- they often suffer exclusion from the school systems and society, making life for them and family members very difficult



7.3. Communication

When a person with an intellectual disability does have difficulty with communication, it may be helpful to keep the following in mind:

- allow additional time to exchange information, be patient in understanding what the other person is trying to say
 - speak directly with the person, not to the personal assistant or caregiver
-
- avoid talking to an adult as if he/she were a child
 - get the person's attention and maintain eye contact, if possible, by using his/her name or by touching his/her arm before speaking
 - if you are in a busy area with many distractions, consider moving to a quieter location
 - use concrete language, be clear and short
 - use concrete as opposed to abstract language, for example: "show me"; "tell me"; "do this" with a gesture; "come with me"; "I'm going to..."
 - avoid shouting; there is no need for that
 - explain what will happen before you begin, so you can prepare the person for what is planned
 - tell and show what you are going to do and why
 - checking for understanding is essential: "Can you tell me what I just said?" "Can you tell me what I am going to do and why?"
 - frequently pause, so as not to overload the person with words
 - give the person enough time to understand what you have said and enough time to respond
 - rephrase and repeat questions, if necessary, or write them out, if the patient can read
 - some people with a more severe intellectual disability may also have difficulty giving you an accurate picture of how they feel because of limitations in interpreting internal cues (e.g. need to urinate, anxiety)

- Involving caregivers who know the patient well may help you to understand his/her experiences better. However, as much as possible, continue to focus your communication efforts on the person
- for individuals with autism and related disorders, respect their preference to avoid eye contact
- focus on the person's abilities rather than disabilities

Remember: every life matters, everyone has something to give and teach. Just because someone presents a different lifestyle and has an intellectual impairment, it doesn't mean you can't relate yourself with them or interact with them. We are all human beings, and we all want and deserve to be fully included in society!

8. For more information about ACCESS INTERACT

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This communication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

For further information related to the ACCESS INTERACT project, please visit:

- the project's website <http://www.accessinteract.eu/>
- ACCESS INTERACT hub <http://youth.accessinteract.eu/>
- ACCESS INTERACT Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/AccessInteract>