

Tips for Effective Communication

Karen A. Myers, PhD

Saint Louis University

When you meet a person with a VISUAL disability

- It is always appropriate to offer your help; just do not be surprised if the individual would “rather do it myself.”
- If you are helping and not sure what to do, ask the person.
- A gentle touch on the elbow will indicate to a person with a visual disability that you are speaking to him/her.
- If you are walking with a person who is blind, do not take that person’s arm; rather let that person take your arm.
- Do not shout. “Blind” does not mean hard of hearing.
- If you have a question for the person with a visual disability, ask him/her, not his/her companion. “Blind” does not mean one cannot speak.
- Never pet a guide dog, except when the dog is “off-duty”. Even then you should ask the dog’s master first.
- Do not worry about substituting words for “see”, “look”, or even “blind”. Do not avoid them where these words fit. You can talk about blindness itself, when you both feel comfortable about it.
- When you meet a person you know with a visual disability, mention your name. It is difficult to recognize voices unless you happen to have a very distinctive one.

When you meet a person with a HEARING disability

- Speak clearly and distinctly, but do not exaggerate. Use normal speed unless asked to slow down.
- Provide a clear view of your mouth. Waving your hands or holding something in front of your lips, thus hiding them, makes lip reading impossible. Do not chew gum.
- Use a normal tone unless you are asked to raise your voice. Shouting will be of no help.
- Speak directly to the person, rather than from the side or back of the person.
- Speak expressively. Because persons who are deaf cannot hear subtle changes in tone, which may indicate sarcasm or seriousness, many will rely on your facial expressions, gestures and body language to understand you.
- If you are having trouble understanding the speech of a person who is deaf, feel free to ask him/her to repeat. If that does not work, then use a paper and pen.
- If a person who is deaf is with an interpreter, speak directly to the person who is deaf – not to the interpreter.

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