

8 Tips for Communicating with People with Disabilities

By Glenda Watson Hyatt

Communication is the basis for interaction between humans. When a disability is involved, the interaction is often hesitant, uncertain or even, unfortunately, avoided. Communicating with people with disabilities can be facilitated with these tips:

1. Speak directly to the person rather than through a companion or sign language interpreter.
2. Offering to shake hands with people who have limited hand use or who wear an artificial limb is appropriate. (The left handshake is acceptable.)
3. Identify yourself and others who may be with you when meeting a person who is sight impaired.
4. When offering assistance, wait until the offer is accepted. Listen to or ask for instructions.
5. Listen attentively when you're talking with a person who has difficulty speaking. Be patient and wait for the person to finish. Ask short questions that require short answers, a nod or shake of the head.
6. Place yourself at eye level by squatting down, leaning against a counter or taking a seat when speaking with a person who uses a wheelchair.
7. To get the attention of a person who is deaf or hard of hearing, tap the person on the shoulder or wave your hand. Look directly at the person and speak clearly and expressively to determine if the person can read your lips.
8. Relax. Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use accepted, common expressions such as "See you later," or "Did you hear about that?" Ask questions when you're unsure of what to do.

Excerpt from Accessibility 100, a project by Glenda Watson Hyatt, offering a series of 100 easy-to-implement, free and inexpensive tips for improving accessibility for people with disabilities. To read more tips, visit <www.doitmyselfblog.com/category/accessibility-100>