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## Building Inclusive Connections: A Guide for Respectful Interaction with People with Disabilities

### Best Practices for Interacting with Individuals with Disabilities

- **Direct Communication**
  - Always address the individual directly, not the person accompanying them (e.g., parent, interpreter, family member).
- **Presume Competence**
  - People with disabilities can make their own decisions. They are experts on their own lives and preferences, and they are often comfortable talking about what they need.
- **Patience and Openness**
  - Be patient and open to learning in all interactions
- **Offering Assistance**
  - Individuals with disabilities will ask for help if needed.
  - Ask the individual how you can be most helpful; they are experts on their own needs.
  - If unsure whether someone needs assistance, always ask.
- **Respectful Interaction**
  - Treat the individual as an adult if they are an adult. Avoid using “baby talk” or talking down to them.
  - If you make a mistake during the interaction, acknowledge it, apologize, and move on.
- **Clear Communication**
  - Use plain language as much as possible; it benefits everyone.
  - Relax and focus on the subject matter, not on disability-related issues, whether during interviews or daily workplace communications.
  - Treat the individual with the same respect and courtesy you extend to everyone.
- **Service Animals**
  - Do not touch or distract service animals, as they are working. Interacting with them can break their training. Some owners may allow interaction when the animal is not working, but many do not.

### Best Practices for Interacting with Individuals with Mobility Disabilities

- **Direct Communication**
  - Speak to the individual directly.

- Avoid referring to the individual as if they are equipment. Example: “There is only room for one wheelchair in this space.”
- **Respect for Mobility Devices**
  - Treat the mobility device as an extension of the person. Do not grab a walker, wheelchair, or other mobility device without permission.
  - Do not reach across a wheelchair user to speak with another person or use their device for your own purposes, such as setting a drink cup on the tray of the wheelchair.
- **Seated Conversations**
  - When speaking with an individual who is seated, try to kneel or sit beside them if the conversation lasts more than a couple of minutes.

### Best Practices for Interacting with Individuals Who Are Hard of Hearing or Deaf

- **Clear Communication**
  - Speak clearly and look directly at the person, even if they have an interpreter.
  - Do not shout or use “baby talk.”
- **Environment Awareness**
  - Be mindful of background noise and lighting around you.
- **Alternative Communication Methods**
  - If the individual is deaf and quick communication is needed, try writing on a piece of paper, such as when offering directions.
  - If the person does not understand you, rephrase your statement instead of repeating it exactly.
- **Respectful Interaction**
  - Do not say, “never mind, it is not important.”
  - Do not assume that all individuals who are hard of hearing or deaf use American Sign Language.

### Best Practices for Interacting with Individuals with Vision Disabilities

- **Identification and Physical Contact**
  - Immediately identify yourself and your role (when appropriate) before attempting any physical contact.
  - Offer your arm to the individual rather than grabbing their arm, hand, etc.
- **Guide Dogs and Assistance**
  - If the individual has a guide dog, walk on the opposite side of the dog.
  - Do not touch the individual’s cane or guide dog.
- **Providing Directions**
  - Be specific when providing directions. For example, say “Move forward until you get to the wall and then turn right,” rather than “Go straight and turn right.”
  - If opening a door for someone, announce which way the door is opening. For example, “The door opens out and to the right.”

- **Leaving the Area**
  - Announce if you are leaving the area.
- **Respecting Independence**
  - Do not move items without announcing they might be in the way and allow the individual the opportunity to move the items themselves.
  - Do not assume all individuals with vision impairments read braille.

### Best Practices for Interacting with Individuals with Communication Disabilities

- **Full Attention**
  - Give the individual your full attention.
- **Environment Awareness**
  - Be aware of background noise, as it may interfere with your interaction.
- **Understanding and Clarification**
  - If you do not understand, ask the individual to repeat what they said.
  - Do not just smile and nod if you still do not understand. It is OK to say, “I am still not understanding you, is there another way you can say it?”
  - Do not finish the person’s sentences.
  - To clarify what you have heard, try rephrasing it to the individual.
- **Nonverbal Communication**
  - If someone is nonverbal, it may be best to ask “yes” and “no” questions. Continue to check in with the individual to ensure they understand.
  - Use alternative communication methods if needed, such as writing or using communication devices.
- **Respectful Interaction**
  - Do not use “baby talk.”
  - Be patient and allow extra time for responses if needed.

### Best Practices for Interacting with Individuals Who Are Neurodiverse (Autism, Schizophrenia, etc.)

- **Clear and Direct Communication**
  - Be clear and direct. Some individuals who are neurodiverse may take phrases literally, such as “It is so quiet in here, I hear crickets.”
  - Be aware that individuals who are neurodiverse may not understand certain cues in conversation. For example, some individuals find it difficult to understand body language, facial expressions, and sarcasm. Consider the most direct approach.
- **Effective Communication Methods**
  - If it seems the individual is not understanding what you are saying, ask what the best way is to communicate. For example, writing it down.
  - If someone’s memory is impacted, you may need to repeat yourself more than once.

- **Respectful Interaction**
  - Do not use “baby talk.”
  - Be patient and allow extra time for responses if needed.

### Best Practices for Interacting with Individuals with Chronic Health Conditions

- **Awareness of Physical Limitations**
  - Understand that the individual may be experiencing fatigue and may need to limit their movements and/or sit down.
  - Be patient if the individual moves or responds more slowly than usual.
- **Communication Considerations**
  - The individual may be experiencing pain or fatigue and might not wish to communicate fully.
  - Respect their need for rest and avoid pressing them for conversation.
- **Environmental Sensitivities**
  - Understand that certain environmental factors may trigger pain, nausea, behavioral changes, etc.
  - Ask if there are any specific conditions or accommodation that would make them more comfortable.
- **Offering Support**
  - Offer assistance without being intrusive. For example, ask if they need help carrying items or if they need a place to rest.
  - Be flexible and understanding if they need to change plans or take breaks unexpectedly.
- **Respectful Interaction**
  - Do not make assumptions about their abilities based on their appearance.
  - Show empathy and understanding but avoid excessive sympathy or pity.

### Authors

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