

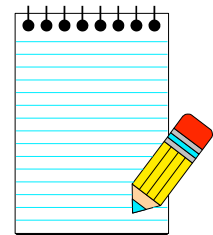
Etiquette Quick Tips

Interacting with People with Speech Disabilities

People with Speech Disabilities

There are people whose speech is difficult to understand. There are also people who are unable to speak so others can understand them. People unable to communicate using natural speech may use a variety of methods that allow them to communicate. Some (NOT ALL) people with limited speech also have difficulty understanding what people say to them because of their disability, age, a hearing loss, cognitive difficulties and/or language differences.

- Do not raise your voice. People with speech disabilities can hear you.
- Give individuals your full attention and take time to listen carefully.
- Always repeat what the person tells you to confirm that you understood.
- Ask questions one at a time.
- Give individuals extra time to respond.
- Take time to understand the message when a person is using a communication device such as a letter, a word board or a device that produces speech.
- Pay attention to pointing, gestures, nods, sounds, eye gaze and eye blinks
- Do not interrupt or finish individuals' sentences. If you have trouble understanding a person's speech do not be afraid to ask them to repeat what they are saying, even three or four times. It is better for them to know that you do not understand than to make an error.
- If you still cannot communicate, try using paper and pen or ask them to spell the message. Do not guess.
- Other strategies to try to help understand the communication include asking if they use a communication board or book or a speech generating device and if they have it with them and if there is someone who can help them communicate?



- Asking them to:
 - “Show me how you say YES.”**
 - “Show me how you say NO.”**
 - “Show me how you point.”**
 - Yes – 1 blink**
 - No – 2 blinks**
 - Help –3 blinks**
- Teach people to indicate these phrases:
 - “I don’t know”**
 - “Please repeat”**
 - “I don’t understand**
- For phone calls try using the Speech-to-Speech Relay Service by calling 711a form of Relay Services that provide Communications Assistants (CAs) for people with speech disabilities. This includes those who use speech generating devices and who have difficulty being understood on the phone. CAs have strong language recognition skills and are trained individuals familiar with many different speech patterns. The CA makes the call and repeats the words exactly.
- Note that talking with an individual using an augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) system is often significantly slower than communicating through natural speech.
- Ask if it is alright for you to try a finish their sentences. Some people are ok with this and others find it annoying.
- Give people time to answer you and consider using open-ended questions. People who use AAC often must plan ahead for situations where there is a lot to communicate in a short time frame, such as giving a presentation during a staff meeting. Fortunately, today’s AAC devices offer the option of preparing messages needed in advance of situations. With that in mind, it is extremely helpful for people who use AAC devices to know as far in advance as possible what topics, questions, or other communication expectations are coming up, allowing them to be as prepared as possible for these situations.

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