

TOOL 9: TIPS FOR COMMUNICATING WITH PEOPLE WITH DIFFERENT TYPES OF IMPAIRMENTS

Below some tips to assist in adapting communication and engagement strategies for persons with different types of impairments:

Communicating and interacting with people with physical impairments

- Move at their speed – Don't walk ahead of them if they are moving slower than you.
- When offering assistance, always ask first what they require. Follow their instructions, and not what you think is best.
- Do not lean on or move someone's wheelchair or assistive device without their permission.
- Discuss transportation options for activities and events. Consider what is going to be safest, most affordable and the least amount of effort for the individual or the family.
- Check that venues for activities are accessible (including toilet facilities, etc) and have sufficient space for people with mobility aids to move around the room.
- When arranging meetings with a participant who uses a wheelchair, provide space at the table for a wheelchair (i.e. move one chair away) and ensure enough space for them to move around the room freely.

Communicating and interacting with people who are Deaf or hearing impaired

- Find out how the person prefers to communicate. Persons with hearing impairments may use a combination of writing, lip reading and/or sign language. This can be determined by observing their interactions with others or by using simple gestures to suggest communication options.
- Get the person's attention before speaking, by raising your hand or waving politely.
- Face and talk directly to a person who is deaf, not to the interpreter (as they are only facilitating the communication).
- Speak clearly – do not shout or exaggerate words as this will make it more difficult to lip read.
- Try not to sit or stand with your back to the light – this can put your face in the dark and make it difficult to lip read.
- Do not cover your mouth or eat while talking. This will make it difficult to lip read.
- Allow the person who is deaf or hearing impaired to choose the best place to sit in a counseling or meeting room to be able to see people clearly and communicate more easily.

A note about sign language: Like spoken languages, sign languages are different between countries and regions. Some people also use unofficial sign language and in these cases, you may need to use a family member or friend to interpret. Ask them to teach you some simple signs (e.g. good, bad and thank you) and try to include these in your discussion.

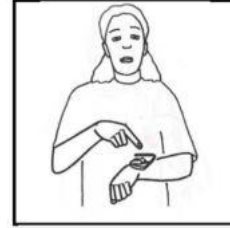
Below is a selection of sign language that is mostly used in daily life:



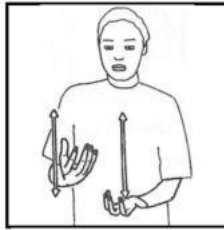
Name



Person



Time



Fire



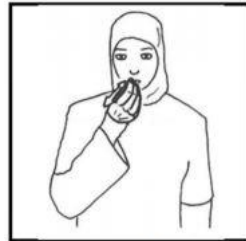
Life



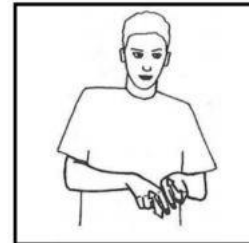
Happiness



Sadness



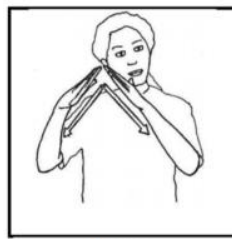
Food



Friend



Break



House



Cold



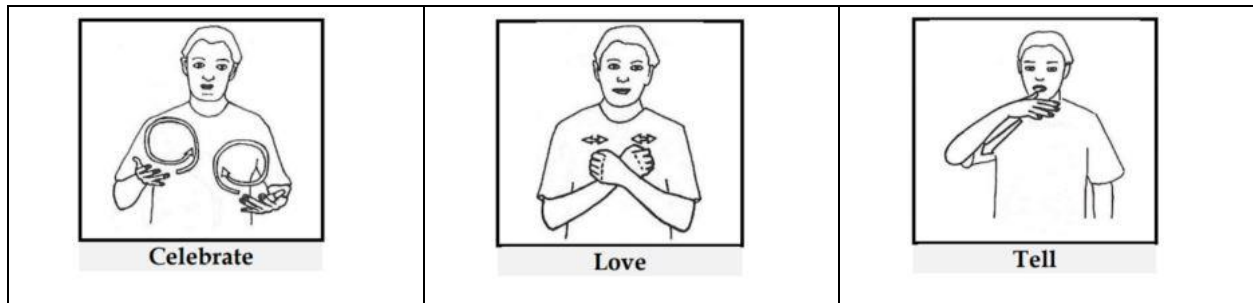
Wait



Learn



Help



Communicating and interacting with people with vision impairments

- Always introduce yourself and other people in the room by name.
- Tell the person if you are moving or leaving their space – do not just walk away.
- If the person has arrived at a new place, tell them who is in the room or group, and offer to describe the environment.
- Avoid vague language, such as “that way” or “over there” when directing or describing a location.
- Always ask the person if they would like assistance to get from one place to another. Ask for instructions on how they would like to be assisted and where they would like to go. Some people prefer verbal guidance, whereas others may prefer for you to physically guide them.
- If you are asked to physically guide someone with a visual impairment, they may want to hold your arm just above the elbow. This will allow them to walk slightly behind you, following you as you turn or step up or down onto steps.
- In counseling session or meetings, describe all pictures, diagrams or paper documents you are using.
- Ask persons with vision impairments if they would like documents in alternative formats, such as Braille or large print. In some contexts, where people have access to computers or smart phones, persons with vision impairments may prefer electronic formats that are accessible through screen reader software.

Communicating and interacting with persons with intellectual impairments

People with intellectual disabilities may experience difficulty in understanding, learning, and remembering, and in applying information to new situations. It is important to note, however, that persons with intellectual disabilities can learn new things and participate in our activities, with just some small changes to the way we work.

- Pay attention to any way in which the individual wishes to communicate. This could be through gestures and sometimes their emotions. Some persons with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities can exhibit a wide range of behaviors. This is sometimes the way they communicate with others. If you observe or sense the person is trying to communicate with you, but you don’t understand, it is okay to say “I don’t understand.”
- Communicate in short sentences that convey one point at a time.

- Use real-life examples to explain and illustrate points. For example, if discussing an upcoming medical visit, talk the person through steps they are likely to have taken before.
- Give the person time to respond to your question or instruction before you repeat it. If you need to repeat a question or point, then repeat it once. If this doesn't work, then try again using different words.
- Allow time for persons with intellectual impairments to ask questions.
- Make sure that only one person is speaking to them at any given time, and that the person with an intellectual impairment is not being rushed to answer.
- Persons with intellectual impairments may want some more time to think about decisions or to discuss their options someone they trust.
- Identify quiet environments to have conversations in order to reduce distractions.
- Pictures, role playing, or drawing can also be used to communicate messages to people with intellectual impairments – these are sometimes called “Easy-To-Read” documents (see Tool 10: Easy-To-Read Information about GBV).

Communicating and interacting with persons with speech impairments

- Plan more time for communicating with persons with speech impairments.
- It is ok to say “I don't understand.” Ask the individual to repeat their point and say it back to them to check that you have it correctly.
- Do not attempt to finish a person's sentences – let them speak for themselves.
- Try to ask questions which require short answers or yes / no gestures.
- If you have tried several ways to understand a person with no success, ask if it is ok to communicate in a different way, such as through writing or drawing.