National Service Inclusion Project:

Fact Sheet

Ten Tips on Communicating with People with Disabilities

1. Treat adults as adults.

- People with disabilities are people. Treat them as you would treat anyone else.

2. Use “person-first language” such as “person with a disability.” Avoid terms such as "disabled," "handicapped," and "impaired."

- When we describe individuals by their medical diagnosis we devalue and disrespect them as individuals. A disability is what someone has, not who they are.

3. If barriers exist, offer reasonable accommodations

- People with disabilities have a right to reasonable accommodations, which are adaptations to a position, setting, or the way things are usually done that enable someone to participate actively in a setting.

4. Respect confidentiality if someone discloses their disability to you.

- If someone discloses their disability to you, view that as a sign of respect and trust. You must treat this information with confidence. Do not share it with anyone unless you get the individual’s permission.

5. Don’t assume that everyone with a disability has compensated for their disability with other heightened abilities.

- For example, not all people who are blind have an exceptional sense of smell or hearing.

6. View individuals based on their assets as opposed to their deficiencies.

7. It is okay to offer assistance, and it is often welcomed. If you do:

- Wait until the offer is accepted. Then listen or ask for instructions.

- If you make a mistake, it's okay. Apologize, learn from it, and move on.

8. Listen attentively when talking with people who have difficulty speaking, and wait for them to finish.

- If necessary, ask short questions that require short answers or a nod of the head.
- Never pretend to understand. Instead, repeat what you have understood and allow the person to respond.

9. Speak at a regular tone when speaking to individuals who are blind or have a hearing loss. Also:

- Identify yourself when speaking with someone who is blind.
- Tap on the shoulder to get the attention of an individual with a hearing loss.

10. **Relax.**

- People with disabilities are people—relax and be yourself when communicating with someone who has a disability. Treat others as you would wish to be treated.