10 Tips for Effective Communication with People with Disabilities

1. Remember that people with disabilities are people first. When referring to someone with a disability, use “people-first language.” Refer to “a person with a disability” rather than, “disabled person” or “the disabled.”

2. Speak directly to the person rather than to a companion or sign language interpreter.

3. Offer to shake hands when introduced to a person with a disability. People with limited hand use or who wear an artificial limb can usually shake hands. If necessary, shaking hands with the left hand is an acceptable greeting.

4. Treat adults as adults. Place yourself at eye level when speaking to someone in a wheelchair or of small stature and make appropriate eye contact.

5. All assistive devices (canes, wheelchairs, crutches, communication boards, etc.) should always be respected as personal property. Also, never distract a service animal from their job without the owner’s permission.
6. If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted before you act.

7. Relax. Don’t be embarrassed if you happen to use common expressions such as “Do you see what I mean?” or “Did you hear about this?” that seem to relate to a person’s disability.

8. To get the attention of a person with a hearing loss, tap the person on the shoulder or wave your hand. Look directly at the person and speak clearly and slowly.

9. When greeting a person with vision loss, always identify yourself and others who may be with you.

10. When talking with people who have difficulty communicating, wait for them to respond and listen attentively. Never pretend to understand, instead repeat what you have understood and allow the person to respond.

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For purposes of the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program, including Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS), OOD received 78.7% of its funding through the DOE VR grant. In Federal fiscal year (FFY) 2018, OOD received $100,336,097 in federal funds. Funds appropriated by the State covered 21.3% of the total costs, or $27,155,767. Of these federal funds, $15,050,415 is set aside for Pre-ETS. For purposes of the Supported Employment Program, the DOE VR grant funded 100% of the costs for the Supported Employment for Youth with a Disability Program. In FFY 2018, OOD received $303,725. The grant also funded 95% of the Supported Employment Program (non-Youth). In FFY 2018, OOD received $303,725 and the State appropriated funds paid the remaining 5% or $33,747 of the total costs. For purposes of the Independent Living Services for Older Individuals Who are Blind (OIB) Program, the federal grant received from DOE in FFY 2018 paid 90% of the total costs incurred under the program. In FFY 2018, OOD received $1,174,400 in federal grant funds. Funds appropriated by the State paid 10% or $130,489 of the total costs incurred under the OIB program. For purposes of the Independent Living (IL) Program, the federal grant received from HHS paid 90% of the total costs incurred in FFY 2018. In FFY 2018, OOD received funding of $632,411. Funds appropriated by the State paid 10% or $70,268 of the total costs incurred under the IL Program.