



## TIPS FOR WORKING WITH INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

### **WORKING WITH INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE SERVICE ANIMALS:**

- Use person first language
- Remember the animal is providing a service and is not a pet
- Do not touch or give the animal food or treats without the permission of the owner.
- When a dog is wearing its harness, it is on duty. In the event you are asked to take the dog while assisting the individual, hold the leash and not the harness.
- A person is not required to give you proof of a disability that requires a service animal. You should accept the claim and treat the animal as a service animal.
- The animal need not be specially trained as a service animal. People with psychiatric and emotional disabilities may have a companion animal. These are just as important to them as a service animal is to a person with a physical disability – please be understanding and treat the animal as a service animal.
- A service animal must be in a harness or on a leash, but need not be muzzled.

### **WORKING WITH INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE A DISABILITY RELATED TO MOBILITY:**

- Use person first language
- Always ask the person how you can help before beginning any assistance.
- A person using a mobility device may be able to negotiate stairs independently. One hand is used to grasp the handrail while the other hand is used for the crutch or cane. Do not interfere with the person's movement unless asked to do so
- Remember if you are working with a person who uses a wheelchair. The wheelchair is an extension of that person's body so do not touch the wheelchair unless you ask or have been instructed to do so by the person

### **WORKING WITH INDIVIDUALS WITH AUTISM:**

- Speak calmly - use direct, concrete phrases with no more than one or two steps, or write brief instructions on a pad if the person can read.
- Allow extra time for the person to respond
- The person may repeat what you have said, repeat the same phrase over and over, talk about topics unrelated to the situation, or have an unusual or monotone voice. This is their attempt to communicate, and is not meant to irritate you or be disrespectful.
- Avoid using phrases that have more than one meaning
- Approach the person in a calm manner. Try not to appear threatening.



### **WORKING WITH INDIVIDUALS THAT ARE DEAF/HARD OF HEARING:**

- There is a difference between hard of hearing and deaf. People vary in the extent of hearing loss they experience. Some are completely deaf, while others can hear almost normally with hearing aids.
- Hearing aids do not guarantee that the person can hear and understand speech. They increase volume, not necessarily clarity.
- Establish eye contact with the individual, not with the interpreter, if one is present
- Check to see if you have been understood and repeat if necessary
- Be patient

### **WORKING WITH INDIVIDUALS WITH VISION IMPAIRMENTS:**

- Announce your presence, speak out, and then enter the area
- Speak naturally and directly to the individual
- Do not shout
- Don't be afraid to use words like "see," "look"

### **WORKING WITH INDIVIDUALS WITH A COGNITIVE DISABILITY:**

- Extra time for the person to process what you are saying and to respond.
- Respect for the dignity of the person as an equal and as an adult (*example: speak directly to the person*).
- Do not talk to the person as if they are a child.
- Use short sentences, simple, concrete words.
- Use accurate, honest information.
- Implement the use of pictures and objects to illustrate your words.

### **WORKING WITH INDIVIDUALS WITH MENTAL ILLNESS:**

- Be respectful to the person. When someone feels respected and heard they are more likely to return respect and consider what you have to say.
- If a person is experiencing events such as hallucinations, be aware that the hallucinations or the delusions they experience are their reality.
- You will not be able to talk a person with mental illness out of their reality; delusional thoughts are real and are motivated by them. Communicate that you understand that they are experiencing those events, but do not pretend that you experience them.
- More personal space may be needed.
- Mental illness has nothing to do with a person's intelligence level. Do not assume they are not smart and will believe anything you say.



## **WORKING WITH INDIVIDUALS WITH MENTAL ILLNESS CON'T:**

- Try to reduce secondary stress by helping them to adjust to the effects of the illness.
- Work with their family and the community to help them provide appropriate supports to the individual.
- Avoid becoming angry or critical of them.
- Do not communicate with them in emotional or loud ways (e.g. by shouting or very emotional expressions of concern). Keep in mind that the person is ill and try not to react impulsively to what the person says or does (e.g. if the person is irritable try not to respond in the same way).
- In a crisis communicate with the person clearly and calmly. It is also not a good idea to give the person lots of instructions. Don't argue, criticize or behave in a threatening way towards them. If appropriate, give the person choices to reassure them that they have some control over the situation.

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